

Schach von Wuthenow:
A Story from the Time of the Regiment Gensdarmes
by Theodor Fontane.

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Note on edition used: The translation is based on the 1901 edition available online through Projekt Gutenberg.

I.

The Salon of Frau von Carayon

In the salon of Frau von Carayon and her daughter Victoria on Behrenstrasse in Berlin, a few friends had gathered on the customary evening, but only a few, since the heat of the day had drawn even the most loyal members of the circle out of doors. Of all the officers of the Gensdarmes Regiment, who on such occasions were rarely absent, only one had appeared, a certain Herr von Alvensleben¹; and he had taken a seat next to the lovely lady of the house, all the while voicing humorous regrets that the very person was lacking who most merited the seat of honor.

Opposite these two, on the side of the table which faced the middle of the room, sat two gentlemen in civilian clothes. Although they had been members of the circle for only a few weeks, they had nonetheless already won a domineering position within it. Most definitely so the younger of the two, a former staff captain, who, after an adventuresome life in England and the United States, had returned home, and was generally looked upon as the head of the military opposition which shaped, or rather terrorized, political opinion in the capital at that time. His name was von Bülow. Nonchalance was an integral part of his creative strength, and he “fenced” as he spoke, with feet widely separated and his left hand in his pants pocket, his right hand giving emphasis to his somewhat theoretical lectures by means of lively gesticulations. His only purpose in speaking—so his friends said—was to deliver a lecture, and he did talk incessantly. The stout gentleman next to him was the publisher of his writings, Mr. Daniel Sander, in every other regard, however, his exact opposite, at least as far as appearance was concerned. His face, which expressed pleasure and sarcasm in equal measure, was framed by a full black beard, while his corpulence was held together by a jacket of Netherlands cloth, closely tailored at the waist. The contrast was completed by Sander's fine white goods, something at which von Bülow in no way excelled.

The conversation at that moment seemed to turn upon the Haugwitz Mission² just completed, which in Bülow's opinion not only restored a desirable harmony between Prussia and France, but also brought us possession of Hanover as a “bridegroom's gift.” Frau von Carayon, however, criticized this because one could not very well bestow or give away what one did not own. Upon hearing this, the daughter, Victoria, who, unnoticed, had been occupied until now at the tea table, cast a gentle glance at her mother while Alvensleben kissed that lady's hand.

“I was certain of your concurrence, dear Alvensleben,” Frau von Carayon began. “But look at our friend Bülow sitting there like Minos and Rhadamanthos.³ He's brooding up a storm again. Victoria, serve Herr von Bülow some of the Karlsbad wafers. That is, I think, the only thing from Austria that he approves of. In the meantime Mr. Sander will tell us about the progress in the new province. I only fear that it is not very significant.”

1 Alvensleben is a historical figure, Louis Charles Alexander of Alvensleben (1778–1842), Prussian officer.

2 Haugwitz mission. Prussian minister Haugwitz (1752-1832) was charged with delivering an ultimatum to Napoleon in 1805. It was rejected, bringing Prussia into closer alliance with Russia, Austria and England. Napoleon detailed Haugwitz under the victory at Austerlitz. Haugwitz was forced to sign a treaty at Schönbrunn in which Prussia lost Ansbach, Cleve, and Neuenburg, but won Hanover.

3 Sons of Zeus, after their death, judges in the underworld.

“Or, let's say instead, that there is *no* progress,” Sander replied. No one who supports the Guelphic lion or the stallion rampant will let himself be ruled by Prussia.⁴ And I can't blame any of them. We were good enough for the Poles in any event. But the Hanoverians are very discriminating.”

“Yes, that they are,” Frau von Carayon affirmed, and added immediately, “perhaps somewhat arrogant, too.”

“Somewhat!” Bülow laughed. “Oh, gentle lady, how rarely one encounters kindness such as yours. Believe me, I have known the Hanoverians for a long time; and since I come from the Old March, I have, so to speak, peered across the fence at them since my childhood, and can assure you, therefore, that everything which makes England so repulsive to me can be found in double measure in the Guelphic homeland. I approve of the scourging we are giving them for that reason. Our Prussian economy is pitiable, and Mirabeau⁵ was right in comparing Frederick the Great's much-praised state to a fruit that was already rotten before it was ripe; but rotten or not, one thing we have at least: a feeling that the world has taken a step forward in the past fifteen years and that its destiny won't necessarily have to be played out between the Nuthe and Notte.⁶ But in Hanover they still believe in the special mission of Kalenberg⁷ and the Luneburg Heath. *Nomen et omen*.⁸ That is the seat of stagnation, a breeding ground of prejudice. *We* know at least that we aren't fit for much, but this recognition carries with it the possibility of improvement. Granted, in some particulars we're still behind them, but on the whole, we're ahead of them, and therein lies a claim and a right which we must make valid. That we, pace Sander, failed in Poland proves nothing. The state didn't exert itself and thought that its tax collectors were good enough to carry culture to the east. That was justified insofar as even a tax collector represents order, if from its unpleasant side.”

Victoria, who had relinquished her place at the tea table as soon as Poland had been brought into the conversation, now challenged the speaker: “Surely you know, Herr von Bülow, that I love the Poles, even *de tout mon coeur* [with my whole heart].” While saying this, she leaned out of the shadow into the bright light of the lamp, so that one could now clearly perceive that the sculpted profile of her face must once have been equal to her mother's, but now numerous pockmarks marred its former beauty.

No one could fail to see this, and the only one who didn't see it, or, if he did, regarded it as insignificant, was Bülow. He only repeated, “Oh yes, the Poles. They dance the mazurka better than anyone; that's why you like them.”

“Oh, no. I like them because they are chivalrous and unfortunate.”

“That too. That's just about right. And one could almost envy them their misfortune because it turns every lady's heart in their favor. When it comes to conquest of the fair sex they long have had a most splendid military record.”

“And who saved...”

“You know my heretical opinions about rescue operations. Especially Vienna! It **was** saved.

4 The lion was a heraldic symbol of the princely dynasty of Guelphs. The silver stallion appears on the Brunswick coat-of-arms (Lower Saxony).

5 Mirabeau (1749-1792), important intellectual and writer of the French Revolution.

6 Two tributaries of the Havel and Dahme in the Potsdam district.

7 Formerly a principality, ceded to Hanover in 1705.

8 Latin. A name and simultaneously a prognostication.

Indeed. But for what purpose? My fantasy just luxuriates in visions of the Sultan's favorite concubine in the crypt of the Capuchin monks. Perhaps right on the site of the memorial to Maria Theresa. There was always something inherently Islamic about those exotic coffee drinkers, and Europe could have stood a bit more of the harem and seraglio business without serious harm....”

A servant entered and announced Cavalry Captain von Schach⁹, and the ladies glowed with joyful surprise as the guest entered immediately thereafter. He kissed Frau von Carayon's hand, bowed to Victoria, and then greeted Alvensleben heartily, but Bülow and Sander with reserve.

“I fear that I have interrupted Herr von Bülow....”

“One simply cannot avoid doing **that**,” Sander answered and moved his chair to one side. Everyone laughed; Bülow himself agreed, and only Schach's more than ordinary reserve showed that either he was troubled by some unpleasant personal experience or that some unpleasant political news had entered the room.

“What do you have for us, dear Schach? You seem preoccupied. Are there new storms....?”

“Not **that**, gracious lady, not that. I have just come from Countess Haugwitz, with whom I spend more and more time now that I'm moving further and further away from the Count and his politics. The Countess knows it and sanctions my behavior. We had just started a conversation when a crowd began to gather in front of the palace, first hundreds, then thousands. The noise kept getting louder and finally a stone was thrown and flew past the table where we were sitting. It just missed the Countess by a hair. But what **really** hurt her were the words, the curses we heard from below. At last the Count himself appeared. He was completely composed and played the perfect gentleman the whole time. But it was a while before the streets could be cleared. Has it now come to this? Insurrection, riot. And that in Prussia under His Majesty's very nose.”

“That would be a sight for the gods,” Sander said. “The Regiment Gensdarmes accused of high treason and riot.”

“And not without justification,” interjected Bülow, now genuinely excited. “Not without justification, I say. And this is a situation you can't minimize with your humor, Sander. These gentlemen who always think they know more than the king and his ministers, why are they so outspoken now? Why are they dabbling in politics? Put aside for a moment the question of whether an army **may** be politically engaged. But if they're going to get involved in politics, then at least let them do it properly. At last we're on the right path, finally we're where we should have been all along, finally His Majesty has listened to the voice of reason, and what is the result? Our gentlemen officers, whose every other word is the king and their loyalty, and who will not be satisfied until things smell more like Russian leather and less like freedom—these officers, I say, are pleased to carry on an opposition, as naïve as it is dangerous, provoking by their bold actions and their even bolder words the anger of the caesar who had hardly been calmed. The common people catch on to that sort of thing very quickly. The gentlemen of the Regiment Gensdarmes did not themselves hurl the stone that eventually landed at the Countess' tea table, but they are the moral instigators of the riot, they created the climate for it.”

“No, the mood was already there.”

“All right. Perhaps it was. But if it was there, then they should have opposed it rather than nourished it. If we feed it, we expedite our downfall. The emperor [i.e., Napoleon] is just waiting for an occasion; we have lots of black marks in his ledger, and if he ever begins to add them up, then we're lost.”

“I don't think so,” Schach replied. “I am unable to follow your line of thinking, Herr von

9 Schach is a surname. The character is always referred to by his family name. The -ch at the end is like Scottish “loch.”

Bülow.”

“My condolences...”

“...are unnecessary. It's easy enough for you to sit there instructing and enlightening me and my comrades about patriotism and loyalty to the king because the principles which you espouse are for the moment the dominant ones. It accords with your most fervent wishes and imperial will that we are now standing at France's table, gathering up the crumbs that fall from the emperor's table. But for how long? The state of Frederick the Great must start thinking of itself again.”

“If only it would,” replied Bülow. “But that's exactly what it is neglecting to do. This wavering, this tentative alliance with Russia and Austria, which alienates us from the *Empereur*—is that the politics of Frederick the Great? I ask you now.”

“You misunderstand me.”

“Then I beg you to free me of my error.”

“I will at least try.... Anyway, you **want** to misunderstand me, Herr von Bülow. I do not oppose the alliance with France because it is an alliance, **nor** because it, like all alliances, seeks to double our strength for one purpose or another. Oh no. How could I? Alliances are necessary tools in **any** foreign policy, even the great Frederick himself used alliances and managed to **change** constantly. But his ultimate goal remained **unchanged**. That was unshakeable: a strong and independent Prussia. And now I ask you, Herr von Bülow, is Count Haugwitz's solution, which evidently meets with your approval, is **that** a strong and independent Prussia? You asked **me**, now I put the question to **you**!”

II.

The Sanctification of Strength

Bülow, whose features began to take on an expression of utmost arrogance, was just about to reply, but Frau von Carayon interrupted and said: “Let's take a lesson from the politics of our age: where there cannot be peace there can at least be an armed truce. Even here. And now, guess who paid us a visit today, dear Alvensleben. Someone famous. Rahel Lewin¹⁰ directed him to us.”

“Then it must have been the Prince,” said Alvensleben. “oh no, even more famous, or at least more sensational. The Prince is an established celebrity, and celebrities who have lasted a decade are no longer celebrities. Let me give you a hint: it's someone from the realm of *belles lettres*. Thus I would assume that Mr. Sander will solve this puzzle for us.”

“Well, I shall at least try, my lady, and your confidence in me has the strength of anointment, or to speak more plainly, I am “sanctified by the strength”¹¹ of your trust.

“Oh excellent! Yes, Zacharias Werner was here. Unfortunately we were out and thus missed the visit intended for us. I was certainly very sorry.”

“You should rather congratulate yourselves on having escaped a disappointment,” Bülow began. “It is not often that a poet corresponds to our image of him. We expect an Olympian, someone who feeds on nectar and ambrosia; instead of that we see a gourmand consume a whole roast chicken; we expect reports of his most confidential conversations with the gods and instead he talks about the last medal he was awarded or even cites the most gracious compliments which Serenissimus let fall about the latest child of his muse. Perhaps even what Serenissima herself had to say, which is always the

10 Rahel Lewin, 1771-1833, wife of Varnhagen von Ense, famous for her intellectual salon in Berlin.

11 Reference is made to a play by Zacharias Werner, “Die Weihe der Kraft,” The Consecration of Strength.

silliest thing you could imagine.”

“But in the last analysis there is nothing sillier than the judgments of persons who have had the advantage of being born in a stall or a barn,” Schach said caustically.

“I regret that I must contradict you, Herr von Schach, in **this** matter as well. In **my** experience, at least, I have found that the difference you dispute does exist, but to the disfavor of His Majesty, if you will permit me to repeat myself. The opinions of ordinary people have no power to rise above the ordinary, but there is always something sympathetic about the embarrassed modesty which clothes them and the sheepishly stammering bad conscience in which it comes to light. And compare that to the voice of the Prince! He is the lawgiver of his realm in every particular, in things large and small, and of course in esthetic matters as well. Do you think that someone who makes life and death decisions can't pass judgment on a few lines of verse? Oh, bah! Let him say what he will, his words are always tablets straight from Mount Sinai. I have heard such decalogues many times; ever since then I've understood what it means to say “*regarder dans le Néant!*”¹²

“But still I agree with Mama,” remarked Victoria, whose intent was to lead the conversation back to its beginning, to the play and its author. “It would have been a real pleasure for me to meet this 'overnight sensation,' as Mama somewhat derogatively called him. You forget, Herr von Bülow, that we are **women**, and that as such we have a right to be curious. To be little pleased by a celebrity is, after all, still better than never to have met one.”

“And we won't see him again, that's for sure,” Frau von Carayon added. “He will be leaving Berlin in the next few days, and anyway he was only here to attend the first rehearsals of his play.”

“Which means then,” Alvensleben interjected, “that there is no longer any doubt of its being performed.”

“I think not. They knew how to win over the court, or knew at least how to refute all the reservations which were raised.”

“I find that incomprehensible,” Alvensleben continued. “I've read the play. He tries to glorify Luther, but everywhere the cloven hoof of Jesuitry sticks out from under the black doctoral gown. What puzzles me most is that Iffland is interested in the piece, and he a Free Mason.”

“From which I conclude simply that he has been given the lead in the play,” Sander replied. “Our principles last only until they come in conflict with our passions or our vanity, then they always come up short. He wants the part of Luther, and that is the decisive factor.”

“I confess that it disturbs me to see Luther on the stage,” said Victoria. “Or am I going too far?”

“Certainly not, my dear Victoria. I agree most heartily with your sentiments. My earliest memories are of our village church where I sat next to my old father who sang every verse of the hymns. And on the left next to the altar hung a full-length picture of Luther with a Bible on his arm, his right hand placed upon it. He stared over at me. And I must say that on many a Sunday the serious face of this man preached to me better and more persuasively than old Pastor Kluckhuhn, who did indeed have the same high cheekbones and the same kind of white clerical collar as the Reformer, but there the similarity ended. And this man of God, whose name we bear and who sets us apart, this man for whom I had nothing but respect and reverence, **him** I do not want to see step from behind the curtains or through a rear entrance. Even if Iffland is playing him; and Iffland is someone whom I respect, I might add, not merely as an artist but also as man of principles and solid Prussian convictions.”

“*Pectus facit oratorem*,”¹³ Sander affirmed, and Victoria rejoiced. But Bülow, who did not gladly tolerate new gods beside him, sat back in his chair, stroked his chin and pointed beard, and said: “You will not be surprised to find me in disagreement.”

12 French. To gaze into the void, to stare into nothingness.

13 Latin. the heart makes the orator.

“Certainly not,” laughed Sander.

“But I should like to defend myself if disagreement cast me in the role of an advocate for that parson-like Zacharias Werner, whose mystical-romantic tendencies are simply repulsive to me. I am no one's advocate....”

“Not even Luther's?” Schach asked ironically.

“Not even Luther's!”

“How fortunate then that he can dispense with such services....”

“But for how long?” continued Bülow, drawing himself upright. “Believe me, Herr von Schach, *he* too is a part of the decadence, like so many other things, and the legal profession can offer him very little assistance.”

“I heard Napoleon speak of a 'Prussian episode',” replied Schach. “Will our fine modernists, with Herr von Bülow at the forefront, perhaps favor us with a 'Lutheran episode' as well?”

“That's the way it is. You've hit on it exactly. But it is not **we** who want to create such a historic period. Such things are not created by individuals, but by History. And at the same time a marvelous connection between the Lutheran and the Prussian episodes will be established. It is another case of 'Tell me the company you keep and I will tell you who you are.' I confess that I think Prussia's days are numbered, and 'If the purple falls, the duke must after it.'¹⁴ I leave to you to decide who should play the parts then. The connections between church and state are not sufficiently valued. In one sense every nation is *run* by the church. The state contracts a marriage with the church, and if the marriage is to be a happy one, then they must both be suited to one another. In Prussia the two are well suited to each other. And why? Because both are constitutionally frail and have gotten into narrow straits. Both are small creatures, destined either to be dissolved or to be subsumed into something larger. And soon. *Hannibal ante portas.*”¹⁵

“I thought your position was,” Schach replied, “that Count Haugwitz had brought us not ruin, but salvation and peace.”

“That he has, but he cannot change our fate, at least not in the long run. This destiny is incorporation into something more universal. National and religious points of view are evanescent things, but the Prussian standpoint and its alter ego, the Lutheran, more so than most. Both are artificial giants. I ask you, what importance do they have? What missions do they fulfill? They're drawing drafts on each other, each gives the other a *raison d'être*, that's all. And you call that a role of international significance? What has Prussia done for the world? What do I have when I tally it up? The famous tall blue-clad soldiers¹⁶ of King Frederick William the First, the iron ramrod; the pigtail, and that marvelous morality which invented the phrase, 'I tied him to the manger, why didn't he eat?'”

“Yes, fine. But what about Luther...”

“Well, all right. There's a legend that freedom came into the world with that man from Wittenberg; and narrow-minded historians have been assuring the north German people of this for so long that it is now taken on faith. But what in truth did Luther bring into the world? Intolerance and witch trials, soberness and boredom. That won't hold a millennium together. This universal monarchy, lacking only the final culmination, will be followed by a universal church, for as small things are interrelated, it is even more the case in larger matters. I won't see this stage Luther, because Mr.

14 Quote from Schiller's play “Fiesco,” 5, 16.

15 Hannibal is before the gates, Latin. Cry of alarm in Rome 212 BCE at an apparent attack on the city (Cicero, 1. Philippica 5, 11).

16 The bodyguards of Frederick Wilhelm the First (1688-1740), father of Frederick the Great.

Zacharias Werner's caricature is simply something that annoys me. But not to see it because it is offensive, because it is a **desecration**, that is beyond my comprehension."

"And **we**, dear Bülow," Frau von Carayon interrupted, "we will see it **despite** its being offensive to us. Victoria is right, and if Iffland's vanity is stronger than his scruples, in **our** case curiosity is stronger. I hope, Herr von Schach and you, dear Alvensleben, will accompany us. Besides, a few of the songs in the piece are not at all bad. We got copies of them yesterday. Victoria, you could sing one or two for us."

"But I've hardly played through them."

"Oh, then I beseech you all the more," remarked Schach. "I cannot abide virtuosity in the salon. What I like in art is poetic questing and groping."

Bülow laughed to himself and seemed to want to say: "Everyone according to his ability."

Schach, however, led Victoria to the keyboard and she sang to his accompaniment:

The blossom sleeps soft and mild
Nestled in a cradle of snow;
Lulled by the winter: "Quickly to sleep,
Thou flowering child."
And the child cries and sleeps away its sights,
And sisters descend from fragrant heights
And love and thrive.

A brief silence ensued, and Frau von Carayon asked, "Well, Mr. Sander, how does it hold up under your criticism?"

"It must be very beautiful," he answered. "I don't understand it. Let's hear more. This blossom, which for the present is still sleeping, will probably wake up someday."

And when May returns so mild
He tears off that mantle of snow
And shakes the blossom, 'Quickly arise,
Thou withering child.'
Painfully it opens its little eyes
And ascends to shining heights
Where beaming young brothers thrive.

There was no lack of enthusiastic applause. But it was really for Victoria and the composition, for when it came to a discussion of the text, everyone confessed to sharing Sander's heretical views.

Only Bülow was silent. Like most of the loyal opposition concerned with the downfall of states, he too had his weak side, and one of them had been touched by the song. In the partially clouded sky outside a few stars shone, the crescent moon there among them. As Bülow looked up through the panes of the high balcony door he repeated, "Where beaming young brothers thrive."

Contrary to his knowledge and volition, he was a child of his time and romanticized everything.

A second and third song were sung, but the same things were said about all of them. Then the company parted at not too late an hour.

Sala Tarone

The clocks on Gensdarmes Square were striking eleven when Frau von Carayon's guests stepped out onto Behrenstrasse, turned left and headed toward Unter den Linden. The moon was veiled and the moisture, which hung in the air and indicated a change in the weather, was pleasant for everyone. At the corner of Unter den Linden, Schach took his leave, pleading off for all sorts of official duties, while Alvensleben, Bülow and Sander agreed to stay together for another hour of conversation.

"But where?" asked Bülow, who in general was not usually choosy, but had a distaste for night spots because "spies and waiters constricted his throat."

"But where?" repeated Sander. "Look, a good choice is quite near here," and he pointed to a corner store above which in fairly large letters could be read: Italian Wine Store and Delicatessen. Sala Tarone, Prop. Since it was already closed, they used a knocker which had been fitted into one side of the door of the house. And sure enough, there was an immediate reaction; a head appeared at the peephole, and after Alvensleben's uniform had vouched for the respectability of these somewhat untimely customers, the key in the latch was turned from inside, and all three entered. The draught which entered with them, however, extinguished the lamp held by the doorman, and a slowly burning lantern right over the back entrance furnished just barely enough light to reveal any dangers lurking in the corridor.

"Now I ask you, Bülow, what do you think of this obstacle course?" Sander growled, forced more and more to squeeze himself through. And really, one did have to tread cautiously, because there were orange and lemon crates with lids opened out in front of the oil and wine casks on both sides of the passageway. "Careful," the doorman said. "This whole place is full of tacks and nails. I stepped on one just yesterday."

"Even *chevaux de frise*¹⁷. .. Ouch, Bülow! A military publisher will get you into a situation like this."

Sander's cry of pain restored the company to its former merriment, and by groping and feeling they finally reached the area of the back door, where, on the right stood a few casks less crowded. Here too they made their way through and, with the help of four or five steep steps, they reached a moderately large back room. The room was painted yellow and was darkened by smoke; like all "breakfast rooms" it always had more people at midnight. In front of the wooden panels stood leather sofas of many years' service, with tables of various sizes. These furnishings were absent in only one place, and on this spot stood a desk surmounted with cubbyholes and shelves. In front of this desk one of the representatives of the firm reigned day in and day out on a revolving stool. From here he shouted his orders (usually only a single word) down to the nearby cellar, the trap door to which was always open.

Our three friends had taken seats in a corner diagonally opposite the entrance to the cellar; and Sander, who had been a publisher long enough to appreciate Lucullan niceties, was glancing over the menu and the wine list. Although bound in Russia leather, the menu smelled like lobster. But our Lucullus seemed to find nothing that pleased him, because he pushed the menu aside and said, "The very least I'd expect from such a sultry April would be woodruff *asperula odorata* Linnei¹⁸ I have also published botanical titles. Our close call out in the hallway convinced us of the availability of fresh oranges, and the management will vouch for the Moselle."

The man at the desk did not move, but it was evident from the slight motion of his back that he

17 French. *Cheval de frise*, plural *chevaux de frise*, a military obstacle consisting of a wooden frame holding barbed wire or spikes.

18 The Latin name for woodruff.

was in agreement; Bülow and Alvensleben made a similar motion and Sander voiced the group's simple desire: "Wine punch with woodruff."

The words had been spoken intentionally loudly and in the tone of an order. And in the same instant the word "Fritz!" thundered from the revolving seat down to the cellar. Then, as if moved by a spring, a figure, at first only half visible, surfaced from the depths of the cellar, and a fat, short-necked boy appeared immediately. In his eagerness to serve he vaulted the last two or three steps, using his hand for support, and in a flash stood in front of Sander whom he seemed to know best.

"Tell me, Fritz, is Sala Tarone really able to provide us with proper woodruff punch?"

"Oh, yes sir."

"But this is only April, and although I am a man who usually accepts substitutes, there's one thing I can't stand: the tonka bean.¹⁹ That stuff belongs in a snuff box, not in a punch bowl. Got that?"

"At your service, Herr Sander."

"Fine, then. Make it with spring herbs. And don't let it steep too long. Woodruff is not camomile tea. Just pour the Moselle—let's say a Zeltinger or a Brauneberger—slowly over the bunch of herbs and that will suffice. Slices of orange merely for decoration. One slice too many and you have a headache. And not too sweet either, and give us a Cliquot²⁰ on the side. On the side, I say. Better is better."

With that, the ordering was completed, and before ten minutes had passed, the punch was delivered; the three or four woodruff leaves floating on top were just enough to prove the authenticity of the recipe.

"That's just the way I like it, Fritz. In some punch you can see stuff floating, like duck-weed, and that's terrible. I think we shall remain friends. And now green glasses, please."

Alvensleben laughed, "Green?"

"Indeed. I know what people say against colored glass, dear Alvensleben, and they have a perfect right to. It is actually a question which has occupied me for some time and one which, among others, belongs to a series of quandaries which run through our lives, no matter what we do. The color of the wine is lost, but the color of spring is added and with it a festive atmosphere. And I regard this as more important. Our eating and drinking, beyond merely keeping us alive, must become more and more a symbolic act, and I very well understand periods during the late Middle Ages when the table setting and the fruit trays meant more than the meal itself."

"How well that suits you, Sander," Bülow laughed. "But I thank God that I don't have to pay the bills for your extravagance."

"But in the final analysis you **do** pay for them."

"Well, that's the **first** time I've ever seen you play the role of grateful publisher. Let's drink to that My word, there's lanky old Nostitz climbing through the trap door. Look, Sander, there's no end to him"

And actually it was Nostitz, who, using a secret entrance, stumbled up the cellar stairs. Nostitz of the Gensdarmes, the tallest lieutenant in the army, who despite his Saxon origins had more or less volunteered all his six foot three inches to the elite corps of the Gensdarmes and had long since learned to cope with whatever small bit of resentment remained. He was a devastating horseman, and courted the ladies—and his creditors even more audaciously. For some time he had been a special favorite in the regiment, so popular that the "Prince"—none other than Prince Louis himself—had on the occasion of the mobilization the year before asked for Nostitz as his adjutant.

Everyone was curious about where he was coming from and they deluged him with questions, but he did not answer them until he had made himself comfortable on the leather sofa. "Where was I?"

¹⁹ Tonka bean, duck-weed, a South American tree fruit; its seeds are used in perfume, liqueur.

²⁰ A brand of champagne.

Why did I play hookey on the Carayons? Because I wanted to check in French Buchholz²¹ to see if the storks have returned, if the cuckoos are still singing, and if the school-master's daughter still has flax-blond braids as long as they were last year. A captivating child. I always have her show me the church, then we climb the tower because I'm simply mad for inscriptions on old bells. You just would not believe what one can find to decipher in these old towers. I've spent some of my happiest and most instructive hours that way."

"She's a blonde, you said. Well, that explains everything. Miss Victoria cannot compete with a Princess Blondie. Even Mama, though beautiful, is a brunette nevertheless. And gentlemen always prefer blondes."

"Well, I wouldn't want to put it so axiomatically," Nostitz continued. "It all depends on the circumstances, which in this case are on the side of my blond friend. Lovely Mama, as you call her, is going on thirty-seven, and in doing the addition I have probably been chivalrous enough to count her four years of marriage by **half** rather than **double**. But this is really a matter for Schach, who will sooner or later be in the position of delving into secrets of her baptismal certificate."

"How so?" Bülow asked.

"How so?" Nostitz repeated. "What poor observers our fine scholars make and even if they are scholars in uniform. Could the relationship between those two possibly have escaped you? And it's rather advanced, I believe. *C'est le premier pas, qui coute*²². . . ."

"You aren't expressing yourself very clearly, Nostitz."

"It's not exactly my fault."

"I for one think I understand you," interrupted Alvensleben. "But you're deceiving yourself, Nostitz, if you think you see a match there. Schach has a very peculiar nature, which—though you might have other things to criticize about it—poses some psychological problems, to say the very least. For example, I never met a man for whom everything depended so completely upon aesthetics, and in this connection he may very well have exaggerated ideas about physical perfection and marriage. At least about any marriage that **he** would enter into. And so I would bet, as sure as I live, that Schach will never marry a widow, even if she were smashingly beautiful. If there were any doubt remaining, then **one** circumstance would put it to rest, and that would be 'Victoria'."

"How so?"

"Just as many a marriage plan has failed because a mother was not presentable, in this case it would fail because a daughter was not presentable. He is actually embarrassed by her lack of beauty, and retreats from the very thought of seeing his 'normality'—if I may express it that way—linked to her 'lack of normality' in any way. He is abnormally dependent upon the judgment of others and especially people of his class, and would never feel able to present Victoria as his daughter to a princess or, indeed, to a lady of any position."

"Possibly, but one can avoid that sort of thing."

"But only with difficulty. To keep her behind the scenes or simply to treat her as a Cinderella would conflict with his fine sensibilities, and he is too humane to do that. Nor would Frau von Carayon tolerate it. For as certainly as she loves Schach, she also loves Victoria; indeed, she probably loves her a great deal **more**. There's an absolutely ideal relationship between mother and daughter, and it's precisely this relationship that endears them to me."

"So let's put to rest any thought of a match," Bülow said. "Just as a personal favor to me, because I'm wild about that woman. She has all the charm of Nature and Truth, and even her faults are charming and adorable. And compared to that **Schach!** He may have his good points, for all I know, but to me he is nothing but a pedant and a pompous ass, and at the same time, Prussian narrowness

21 A village in Prussia six miles north of Berlin.

22 French. It's the first step that takes the most effort.

incarnate with its three articles of faith: first, that 'the world rests no more securely on Atlas's shoulders than the Prussian state rests on the Prussian army; second, that 'no attack by the Prussian infantry can fail', and third and last, 'a battle is never lost as long as the Regiment Garde du Corps has not yet attacked.' Or the Gensdarmes Regiment, of course. Because they are siblings, fraternal twins. I despise such phrases, and the day is near when the world will recognize the vapidness of such swagger."

"And yet you underestimate Schach. He is nevertheless one of our very best."

"So much the worse."

"One of our best, I say, and he's **really** a good fellow. He's not just playing at chivalry, he really lives it. Granted in his own way. At least he wears an honest face and not a mask."

"Alvensleben is right," Nostitz corroborated. "I don't care for him very much, but it's true, everything about him is genuine, even his stiff formality, as boring and insulting as I find it. *That's* how he's different from us. He's always himself, no matter whether he's entering a salon or standing in front of a mirror, or putting on his saffron-colored gloves before going to bed. Let Sander, who doesn't like him, have the last word and pronounce a judgment about him."

"Hardly three days ago," the publisher began, "I read in Haude & Spener's newspaper that the emperor of Brazil had promoted St. Anthony to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and had advised his minister of war to keep a salary on the books for the aforesaid saint until further notice. The extension of credit impressed me more than the promotion. But no matter. In times of appointments and promotions of that order it will not seem amiss if I summarize the emotions of the hour and also my own opinion and judgment in these words, 'Long live His Majesty, Captain Schach.'"

"Oh, excellent, Sander," Bülow said, "you hit the nail right on the head. The whole ridiculous matter in a nutshell. A little man trying on big boots! But for all I care, hip, hip, huray!"

"If that weren't enough, we still have that talk about 'His Majesty's most loyal opposition,'" Sander answered and stood up. "And now, Fritz, the check. Gentlemen, please allow me to take charge of the business end."

"It's in the best of hands," Nostitz said.

And five minutes later they all stepped outside. Dust was billowing up Unter den Linden from the direction of the Brandenburg Gate; evidently a strong storm was brewing and the first few raindrops were already falling.

"*Hâtez-vous.*"²³

And each man heeded the admonition and endeavored to get home as quickly as possible by the most direct route.

IV.

In Tempelhof

The morning of the following day found Frau von Carayon and her daughter in the same corner room in which they had entertained their guests the night before. Both of them loved this room and preferred it to all the others. It had three high windows, two at right angles to each other facing Behrenstrasse and Charlottenstrasse, while the third, a French window, filled the whole truncated corner and led to a balcony framed by a gilded Rococco railing. As soon as the season allowed, this

23 French. Make haste.

window was opened, and from almost any point in the room one could observe the goings-on in the street, which were often very lively despite its being an aristocratic neighborhood, especially during the spring parades when not only the famous old infantry regiments of the Berlin garrison, but also—and this was more important for the Carayons—the regiments of the Garde du Corps and the Gendarmes passed by the house to the sound of silver trumpets. On such occasions (when it was only natural that the officers directed their glances up towards the balcony) the corner room came into its own and would not have been traded for any other.

But even on quiet days it was a charming room, elegant and cozy at the same time. Here lay the Turkish carpet which had seen the brilliant St. Petersburg days of the Carayon family, now almost half a generation back; in this room stood the table clock of green malachite, a gift from Catherine the Great; and, most importantly, here reigned the richly gilded mirror which daily had to reassure Frau von Carayon that she was still a beautiful woman. Victoria herself never missed a chance to comfort her mother on this important point, but Frau von Carayon was clever enough to let her own image, which she could consult personally, reconfirm it anew every morning. Anyone even vaguely familiar with the internal relationships of the Carayon home knew whether in such moments her gaze darted to the full-length portrait of Herr von Carayon above the sofa, red-beribboned, or whether a more well-built image presented itself to her mind. For Monsieur von Carayon had been a short, swarthy French immigrant, who had brought nothing of importance to the marriage except a few Carayons of nobility living in the area of Bordeaux, and a membership in the delegation [in Berlin}, which was his great pride. Least of all masculine beauty.

The clock struck eleven, first outside, then in the corner room where the two ladies busied themselves over a cross-stitch frame. The door to the balcony stood wide open, for in spite of a rain which had lasted until morning, the sun was again shining brightly and creating the same sultriness which had prevailed the day before. Victoria looked up from the needlework and recognized Schach's little groom, who was coming up Charlottenstrasse in top boots and a two-colored hat, about which Victoria liked to say they were Schach's "national colors."

"Oh look!" Victoria said, "there comes little Ned. And how self-important he seems! But he's getting too spoiled, and more and more a laughing stock. Why would he be coming?"

Her curiosity was not to remain long unsatisfied. A moment later they both heard the doorbell ring and an old servant in spats entered to present a letter on a small silver tray. Victoria took it. It was addressed to Frau von Carayon.

"For **you**, Mama."

"Go ahead and read it," the latter said.

"No, you read it, I'm wary of secrets."

"You silly thing," the mother laughed, opened the letter and read: "Most gracious lady, last night's rain improved not only my path homeward but the air as well. Altogether a day so beautiful as April seldom grants to us Hyperboreans. ²⁴I shall stop with my coach in front of your apartment at four o'clock to take you and Fräulein Victoria for a drive. I'll expect you to give the orders about our destination. But please realize how gladly I follow your orders. Please reply via the messenger. He knows just enough German to be able not to confuse 'Yes' and 'No'. With greetings and compliments to my dear friend Victoria (to avoid any misunderstandings she might perhaps write a note), Yours, Schach."

"Well, Victoria, what shall we say?"

"Oh, Mama, there's really no question, is there?"

"Well then, it's 'Yes....'"

Meanwhile, Victoria had already sat down at the desk and her quill was making a scratching noise: "We accept with sincerest thanks, although the destination shall remain secret for the present. But when the moment of decision has finally arrived, then we will be able to choose the right thing."

Frau von Carayon read over Victoria's shoulder. "It sounds so ambiguous," she said.

"Well, I'll just write a simple 'yes' and you can countersign it."

"No, it's all right."

And Victoria folded the sheet and gave it to the groom waiting outside.

When she came back into the room from the hallway, she found Mama in a pensive mood. "I don't like this kind of teasing, and especially such puzzling statements."

"It wouldn't be right for **you** to write like that. But me? I may do anything. And let me tell you, Mama, something just has to happen. There's so much talk about us, even I hear it; and since Schach still hasn't said a word, and you **can't** say anything then **I** must do it for you and help you to get married. Everything in the world gets turned around once in a while. Normally mothers marry off their daughters, but in this case I'm making a match for you. He loves you and you love him. You're the same age, and you'll be the most handsome couple that ever said vows in the French cathedral or in Trinity Church. At least I'm letting you choose the preacher and the church. I can't do any more in this matter. It's not good that I have to be brought along into this marriage, but it's not bad either. Where there is light there are also shadows."

Frau von Carayon's eyes moistened. "Oh, Victoria, dear, you don't quite see things as they are. I don't want to surprise you with confessions, and speaking in innuendos, as you occasionally like to do, is not my way of doing things. I'd also rather not philosophize. But let me tell you **one** thing: everything is prescribed within us, and what seems to be a cause is usually only effect and result. Believe me, your tender hands will **not** tie the knot that you're hoping to tie. It won't happen, it can't happen; it cannot be. I know better. And why not? Ultimately, I only love **you**."

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of an old lady, the sister of the late Herr von Carayon, who had a standing invitation to Tuesday lunch, and understood by "lunch" twelve noon sharp, although she well knew that the Carayons did not eat until three. Aunt Marguerite—that was her name—was a member of the original French colony, that is to say, an old lady who spoke Berlin dialect, which in her day functioned almost exclusively with the dative case where one would normally expect the accusative. She preferred the "oi" sound to "er" or "ur", and so she liked fresh "hoibs" and went to "choich." Naturally she garnished her speech, lips puckered, with a sprinkling of French and French forms of address. Dressed neatly in an old-fashioned style, she wore the same little silk coat summer and winter, and she had the half-stooped look then so common among old emigres that as a child Victoria had once asked, "Why is it, Mama, that almost all aunts are so, oh, I don't know" and had hunched her shoulders while asking. A pair of silk gloves went with Aunt Marguerite's silk coat; these she was very fond of, never putting them on until she had gotten to the top landing of the staircase. She never lacked for things to say, but they were completely devoid of interest, especially, when she spoke, as she delighted in doing, of highly-placed persons. Her speciality was the little princesses of the royal family, *la petite princesse Charlotte, et la petite princesse Alexandrine*, whom she occasionally saw in the apartment of one of her friends who was a French governess; in fact, she felt herself linked to the little princesses to such a degree that when the guard at the Brandenburg Gate once neglected to present arms and play a drumroll as the young Princess Alexandrine passed by, she not only shared the general feeling of indignation, but also looked upon the event altogether as if Berlin had suffered an earthquake.

This, then, was Aunt Marguerite, who was just coming in.

Frau von Carayon went up to her and bade her a hearty welcome, probably more hearty than usually, simply because the arrival had broken off a conversation which she herself no longer had the

strength to bring to an end. Aunt Marguerite sensed immediately how fortuitous was her lot today, and she had no sooner sat down and stuffed her silk gloves into her sewing bag, than she began to direct her attention to the upper nobility in royal residences, this time to those in the company of “most high sovereigns.” What she had to say about the nobility was, as a rule, far preferable to her anecdotes about the court, and would have been generally acceptable, if she had not had the fault of underestimating important questions about personality. In other words, she always got the names confused, and if she told of an escapade involving Baroness Stieglitz, then one could be sure she really meant Countess Taube. Thus the day's conversation was opened by such novelties as “Captain von Schenk of the Regiment Garde du Corps had serenaded the Princess of Croy”; this was by far the most important communication, for a small interchange established the fact that “Captain von Schenk” was really “von Schach”, and the “Regiment Garde du Corps” was the Regiment Gensdarmes, and the “Princess of Croy,” the Princess of Carolath. Aunt Marguerite accepted such corrections every time without the least sign of embarrassment, nor was she embarrassed today to learn that in the course of that very afternoon, Captain von Schenk, alias Schach, was expected to take them for a promised ride into the countryside. Perfect cavalier that he was, he would certainly be happy to see a dear family member take part in the excursion. A remark which was very favorably received by Aunt Marguerite and which was accompanied by an involuntary fussing with her taffeta dress.

They sat down to table at exactly three o'clock and at exactly four—*l'exactitude est la politesse des rois*,²⁵ Bülow would have said—an open carriage appeared at the door on Behrenstrasse. Schach, who was driving, was about to give the reins to the groom when the two Carayons waved from the balcony, ready to travel, and an instant later appeared down by the coach, armed with handkerchiefs, parasols and parapluies. Aunt Marguerite was with them too; she was introduced and Schach greeted her with his own peculiar mixture of courtesy and *grandezza* [exaggerated dignity].

“And now for that secret destination, Fräulein Victoria.”

“Let's go to Tempelhof,” she said.

“An excellent choice. But, if you will pardon me, **that** is the least secret of goals in the whole world. Today especially. Nothing but sun and more sun.”

They passed along Friedrichstrasse at a rapid pace, first going by roundabout and the Halle Gate, until the sand-covered street leading to the Kreuzberg forced them to go more slowly. Schach thought he should apologize for the conditions, but Victoria, who sat backwards and by simply turning her head could speak comfortably with Schach, was, as a genuine child of the city, sincerely charmed by each and every thing they saw on both sides of the road; nor did she tire of asking questions and he was reassured by her interest. What amused her most of all were the strangely stuffed scarecrows—patched figures of old women—that stood around among bushes and garden plots and wore either a basket-like straw hat or hundreds of hair-curlers that fluttered and rattled in the wind.

Finally, after they had reached the end of the sloping extension, they trotted faster again down the hardened path which ran between the poplars on the way to Tempelhof. Along the street they could see kites, and swallows darted back and forth, and the church towers of the nearest villages sparkled on the horizon.

Aunt Marguerite, who was constantly trying to keep the wind from blowing her small coat collar out of order, nevertheless assumed the role of tour guide, and amazed the two Carayon ladies as much by her confusion of names as by her discovery of non-existent similarities.

“Look at that choich tower, Victoria dear! Don't you think it's like our choich in Dorotheenstadt?”

Victoria did not reply.

25 French. Usually, punctually is the politeness of kings.

"I don't mean its steeple, Victoria dear, no, I mean its *corps de logis*."

Both ladies were horrified.²⁶ But then **that** happened which normally happens in such circumstances, namely this: everything embarrassing to those standing close by is either not heard by those standing further away, or is received with indifference. And now Schach of all people! He had lived much too long in the world of old princesses and ladies of the court to be especially surprised by any sign of stupidity or gap in education. He only smiled and seized upon Aunt Marguerite's words to ask Frau von Carayon "whether she had seen the monument erected in the above-mentioned church in Dorotheenstadt by the late king in memory of his son, the Count of the March?"

Mother and daughter answered in the negative. Aunt Marguerite, however, who did not like to confess **not** knowing something, or, worse, not even to have seen something, blurted out, "Oh, the poor dear prince. It's just terrible that he had to die so young. And he had his late mother's eyes."

For a moment it seemed that Schach, whose feelings of legitimate succession had been sorely wounded, was about to answer and dethrone the "deceased mother's poor little prince" most reprehensibly. But he quickly saw the ridiculousness of such an idea, and so, just to have something to do, pointed to the green-domed roof of Charlottenburg Castle, which was beginning to come into view, and then he turned off onto the wide, linden-lined main street of Tempelhof village.

The second building they spotted was an inn. Schach turned over the reins to the groom and jumped down to help the ladies as they got out. Frau von Carayon and Victoria accepted his aid gratefully, but Aunt Marguerite declined: "Many thanks, indeed, but in my experience one is always safest in one's own hands."

The beautiful day had lured many customers outdoors and all the tables on the terrace surrounded by a picket fence were already taken. And this caused a small embarrassment. But just as they had decided to have coffee in the rear garden in a little half-enclosed pavilion for bowling, a corner table became free, enabling them to remain in that part of the building that faced the main street of the village. So they stayed in front, and, as it turned out, theirs was the best table in the house. A maple tree was growing through the center of the table, and although it still had no foliage except at the very top, there were nevertheless birds twittering in the branches. And that was not all they could see: carriages were stopping in the middle of the street, coachmen from the city chatted with each other; farmers and hands, returning from their fields with plow and harrow, walked past the row of coaches. At length a flock of sheep came by herded from both sides by a small sheepdog. And above this they could hear the vesper bells ringing, for it was now just six o'clock.

The Carayons, spoiled city folk that they were, or perhaps exactly **because** that is what they were, bubbled about anything and everything and were elated when Schach suggested an evening walk to the Tempelhof church. Sundown was simply the nicest time, he said. To be sure, Aunt Marguerite, who feared the "unreasonable cattle," would have preferred to remain seated at the coffee table; but when the waiter, who had been summoned to ease her mind on the matter, assured her most positively that "she need not fear the bulls," she took Victoria's arm and walked with her out to the main street while Schach and Frau von Carayon followed. And everyone sitting near the picket fence watched their progress.

"Your latest ploy was simply marvelous," Frau von Carayon said, and laughed.

Schach looked at her as if to ask what she meant.

"Yes, my friend, I know all about it. And no less an authority than Aunt Marguerite told us about it over lunch."

"About what?"

"About the serenade. Lady Carolath is a woman of the world, and above all, a princess. And

26 "Horried" because Aunt Marguerite has applied an architectural term from secular buildings to a church.

you **do** know what they say behind your back, that you would prefer the most common-looking princess to the **prettiest** commoner. And just any ordinary princess, too. And, as if that weren't enough, Lady Carolath is even beautiful. *Un teint de lys et de rose.*²⁷ You're going to make me jealous."

Schach kissed the lady's hand. "Aunt Marguerite has reported correctly, and now you shall have the whole story. Even the smallest details. Because if it's pleasant for me, as it **is**, to number such an evening among my experiences, then it is even more pleasant for me to talk about it with my lovely lady-friend. Your witty conversation—jesting, critical, and at the same time, full of goodwill, makes everything dear and valuable to me. Don't laugh. Oh, I wish I could tell you everything. Josephine, dear, you are my ideal of a woman: intelligent, but not pedantic and conceited; you have *esprit* but no sarcasm. The tributes which my **heart** offers are, as always, for you alone, my most adorable and best one. And your greatest charm, my dear friend, is that you don't even know how good you are and what silent power you have over me."

He had spoken movingly and the lovely lady's eyes shone while her hand trembled in his. But she quickly resumed the joking mood and said, "You say all the right things. But don't you know that only a guilty conscience could make someone talk like that?"

"Or the heart. But let's stop with a guilty conscience that seeks reconciliation. And confession above all. That's why I came yesterday. I had forgotten that you would be having guests, and was nearly terrified when I saw Bülow and that pompous bourgeois Sander. Why do you have anything to do with him?"

"He's Bülow's shadow."

"It's a funny kind of shadow that weighs three times more than the object that casts it. A real mammoth. Only his wife is said to be larger than he, and recently I heard someone say jokingly that 'when Sander wants to take a walk for his health, he just walks around his wife three times.' And a man like **that** Bülow's shadow? Now if you had said his Sancho Panza . . ."

"So you take Bülow for a Don Quixote?"

"Yes, madame. You know that in general I don't like to speak ill of people, but in this case it is really not slander but rather flattery. Our good man of La Mancha was an honest enthusiast, and I ask you now, dearest friend, can the same thing be said of Bülow? Enthusiast! He is eccentric, that's all, and the fire that burns within him is merely that of an infernal egotism."

"You misunderstand him, Schach dear. He is embittered, certainly, but I'm afraid he has a right to be."

"Anyone who suffers from an abnormal sense of superiority will always have a thousand reasons for being bitter. He goes from group to group preaching the cheapest of all truths, the truth *post festum*.²⁸ Ridiculous. The responsibility for all the humiliations we suffered last year does not lie—if you listen to him—with the arrogance or strength of our enemies. Oh, no. Those forces could easily have been dealt with if we had made timely use of our talents, that is to say, of Bülow's talents. But the world neglected to do that, and that's why it's going to downhill fast. And so *ad infinitum*. That explains Ulm and Austerlitz.²⁹ Everything would have had a different complexion, would have happened differently, if that Corsican plunderer of thrones and crowns, that angel of darkness called Bonaparte had met the luminous Bülow on the field of battle. It's repulsive to me. I abhor such boasting. He speaks of Generals Braunschweig and Hohenlohe as of ridiculous lime-lighters, but I stand by the Friderician statement that the world rests no more securely on Atlas's shoulder than does Prussia on the shoulders of her army."

27 An ideal complexion, composed of red and white.

28 Latin. With 20/20 hindsight.

29 The reference is to two of Napoleon's victories during his invasion of the German-speaking lands.

While this conversation was being carried on between Schach and Frau von Carayon, the two who were walking ahead of them had come to a point on the way at which a footpath branched off and led across a freshly-plowed field.

"That's the choich," Auntie said and pointed with the parasol to the redness of a newly-covered tower-roof visible through all sorts of bushes and branches. Victoria agreed, since it was something that could not be contested, and immediately thereafter turned around to ask her mother, gesticulating with head and hands, whether they should take the footpath which branched off at that point. Frau von Carayon nodded approval, and aunt and niece continued in the indicated direction. Larks flew up all around the brown fields where their nests had already been built, although no seeds were yet planted. At the very end lay a field of fallow ground which extended to the cemetery wall, and except for a slender patch of grass, it exhibited nothing but a funnel-shaped pool in which a pair of toads was making music and at the edge of which rushes grew.

"Look, Victoria, those are rushes."

"Yes, Auntie."

"Can you imagine, *ma chère*, that when I was young, rushes were used as small night lights, and they really did float very quietly in a glass container when you were sick or simply couldn't sleep . . ."

"Of course," said Victoria. "Now they just take a little piece of wick, cut it and put it in a small piece of stiff paper."

"That's right, my little angel. But they used to use rushes, *des joncs*.³⁰ And they would burn too. That's why I'm telling you. They must have had some kind of natural oil in them, probably something like resin."

"That's very likely," answered Victoria, who never contradicted her aunt; while she was saying this her attention wandered to the pond where the music of the toads was getting louder and louder. But she soon noticed that a half-grown girl was running towards her from the church and that she was being followed by a teasing white spitz, which jumped around her barking and biting. And as she ran, the little girl tossed a church key tied with a string to a bobbin into the air and caught it so deftly that neither key nor bobbin could hurt her. At length she stopped and put her hand over her eyes because the setting sun blinded her.

"Are you the sexton's daughter?" Victoria asked.

"Yes," said the child.

"Then please give us the key or come with us and open the church again. We'd like to see it, and that lady and gentleman would too."

"Fine," said the child and ran ahead of them, climbed over the cemetery wall and soon disappeared behind the hazelnut and dog-rose trees, which grew so close together that they formed a thick hedge, even though the leaves were not out yet.

Auntie and Victoria followed her and slowly climbed around neglected graves untouched by the hand of spring; nowhere was a green leaf to be seen, and only directly next to the church was one moist and shady spot perfect for violets. Victoria bent over and picked a few hastily, and as Schach and Frau von Carayon came up the main path to the church in the next moment, Victoria went over to them and gave her mother the violets.

In the meantime the little girl had already opened up and sat waiting on the threshold. But when both couples had arrived, she got up quickly and preceded them into the church where the choir stalls were leaning almost as much as the crosses on the graves outside. The whole effect was one of impoverishment and decay; however, the sun, a ball of fire, was just sinking behind windows set on the western side and thus it flooded the walls with a reddish luster, and renewed, for a few moments at

30 Repeats "rushes" in French.

least, the long-since faded gilt on the old saints above the altar, who, having survived from the Catholic era, now just bided their time. It only remained for Calvinist Aunt Marguerite to be horrified at the sight of “idols.” Schach, however, who numbered genealogy among his hobbies, inquired of the little girl whether there might not be some old gravestones.

“There is one,” the little girl said. “This one here,” and she pointed to a carved stone image, foot-worn but still plainly recognizable, which had been set into a pillar very close to the altar. It was evidently a colonel of the cavalry.

“And who is it?” asked Schach.

“One of the Knights Templar,” the child replied, “His name was Sir Tempelhof. And he had this grave marker made while he was still alive because he wanted it to look like him.”

At this point Auntie Marguerite nodded approvingly because the alleged Sir Tempelhof's need for verisimilitude struck a chord in her heart.

“And he built this church,” the little girl continued, “then he built the village too, and called it Tempelhof, because that was his own name. And the Berliners say 'Temploff,' but that's wrong.”

The ladies received all this with reverence, and only Schach, whose curiosity had been aroused, asked further “whether she knew any of the particulars of the period in which the knight lived.”

“Nothing about that period, but later.”

Everyone listened carefully, especially Auntie Marguerite, who immediately began to get gooseflesh. The little girl, on the other hand, continued in a calm tone: “I don't know whether all that people say is true. But an old cottager named Maltusch was there at the time.”

“Well, what is it, child?”

“For a hundred years the knight lay here in front of the altar until it began to bother him that the peasants and children being confirmed were always standing around on top of him and wearing down his face when they went up to receive communion. And old Maltusch, who's now going on ninety, told me and my father that he had heard the noise and groaning with his own ears, just as if it had been thundering just over in Schmargendorf.”

“It's quite possible.”

“But they didn't know what the rumbling and roaring meant,” the child continued. “And time passed until the year when the Russian general—I always forget his name—was camped out in the field here. One Saturday the sexton who used to be here came to erase the old hymn numbers and to post new ones up for Sunday. And already had the chalk in his hand. But he noticed all of a sudden that the numbers had already been erased and that the new hymn numbers and the references to a chapter and verse in the Bible had been written in their stead. It was all in an old-fashioned and unclear kind of writing and you could just barely read it. But when they looked it up they found: 'Thou shalt hold thy dead in honor, and injure not their countenance.' So then they knew who had written the numbers, and they took the stone out and plastered it into that pillar.”

“Well, I think,” said Aunt Marguerite, who all the more vigorously contested the existence of ghosts the more her momentary fear of them increased, “well, I do think that the government ought to do something about superstition.” And with that she nervously turned away from the uncanny stone carving and walked back to the door with Frau von Carayon, who as far as fear of ghosts was concerned, ran Auntie Marguerite a close second.

Schach followed with Victoria, to whom he had offered his arm.

“Was he really a Templar knight?” Victoria asked. “My knowledge of Knights Templar extends only as far as the one in Lessing's 'Nathan the Wise,' but unless costumes are treated totally arbitrarily, then Templar knights must have looked completely different from this one. Am I right?”

“**Always** right, my dear Victoria.” And the tone of these words pierced through her heart and reverberated there, without Schach's being aware of it.

"Fine. But if he wasn't a Templar, then what was **was** he?" She asked further and looked at him confidently but with some embarrassment.

"A cavalry colonel from the Thirty Years' War. Or perhaps no earlier than the days of Fehrbellin."³¹ I can even read his name: Achim von Haake."

"So you think the whole story is just made up?"

"No, not exactly, or at least not completely. It has been shown that there were Templars in this part of the country, and this church with its pre-Gothic style may very well go back to those days. That much is believable."

"I find the order so interesting."

"So do I. It was most severely punished by God's wrath, and for that very reason it's the most fascinating and the most poetic. You know what they were accused of: worshipping idols, denying Christ, all sorts of vices. And with some justification, I'm afraid. But they certainly paid dearly for their sins, no matter how many they committed, not to mention the fact that here again innocent descendants had to expiate the sins of earlier generations. That's the lot and fate of all who avoid the commonplace, even in their sins and errors. And thus we see this guilt-laden order perishing in a halo of newly-won glory, all its evil deeds notwithstanding. It was envy that killed it, envy and self-interest; and guilty or not, its greatness overwhelms me."

Victoria smiled. "Anyone listening to you, dear Schach, would think he was hearing a latter-day Templar. And yet it was a monastic order as were its vows. Would you have been able to live and die a Templar?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you're charmed by their costume, which was even more dashing than the tunic of the Gensdarmes."

"It's not the costume, Victoria. You misjudge me. Believe me, there's something in me that keeps me from vows of any kind."

"And could you keep them?"

But before he could answer, she rushed on in a more jocular vein. "I believe that Philip le Bel has that order on his conscience. It's funny, but I find all the historical figures who bear the epithet 'the Handsome' or 'the Beautiful' unappealing. I hope it's not out of envy. But it must be true that beauty makes people self-centered, and whoever is focused on himself is ungrateful and unfaithful."

Schach tried to refute this. He knew that no matter how much Victoria loved teasing and making intimations, her words could certainly not have been directed against **him**. And he was right on the mark, too. It is all a mere *jeu d'esprit* [witticism], an indulgence of her inclination to philosophize. And yet everything she had said, although certainly uttered with no deliberate purpose, had just as certainly been spoken from dark presentiment.

By the time their verbal sparring was over, they had reached the entrance to the village; and Schach stopped to wait for Frau von Carayon and Aunt Marguerite, who had fallen behind.

When they caught up, he offered Frau von Carayon his arm and escorted **her** back to the inn.

Victoria, somewhat hurt, followed them with her eyes and reflected on the exchange which Schach had not even tried to excuse: "What did it mean?" And she grew pale as she answered her own question with a sudden suspicion.

There was no more talk of taking a seat in the restaurant terrace, a pleasure all the more easily and gladly dispensed with since it had gotten chilly in the meantime; and the wind which had been blowing all day had shifted to the northwest.

Aunt Marguerite sought out the back seat so that she "wouldn't have to ride against the wind."

31 Fehrbellin, June 18-28, 1675.

No one opposed her. So she took the seat she had requested, and while everyone silently pondered the personal meaning of the afternoon, the return to the city proceeded ever more swiftly.

Twilight was already upon the city by the time they had reached the slopes of the Kreuzberg; only the twin domes on Gensdarmes towers rose above the gray-blue fog.

V.

Victoria von Carayon to Lisette von Perbandt

“Berlin, May 3rd

Ma chère Lisette,

How happy I was to hear from you at last—and such good news. Not that I had expected anything different; I have met few men who seemed to offer so absolute an assurance of happiness as yours. Healthy, benevolent, unpretentious, and of just that perfect degree of education and maturity that avoids dangerous extremes. Of the two perhaps too much learning is the more dangerous. For young women are only too prone to make the demand: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” I see that sort of thing almost every day at the Rombergs, and Marie is hardly grateful to her clever and amiable husband for being more interested in politics and French newspapers than in paying social calls and in dressing up.

The one thing that gives me some concern is that you will be making your home in Masuria,³² a part of the world that I always imagined as one tremendous forest with a hundred lakes and marshes. And then I thought that your new homeland could easily cast you into a dreamy melancholy, which is always the first step towards the onset of homesickness or even of mourning and tears. And men are terribly afraid of that, so I'm told. But to my great joy, I see that you have also escaped **that** danger, and that the birch trees around your castle are green spring birches and not weeping birches. **Apropos**, you have to write me sometime about that famous birch-tree sap. It is one of those things which has always aroused my curiosity and which I have not yet had a chance to learn anything about.

And now I should tell you about **us**. You were so kind as to ask about all the goings-on here and even wanted to hear about Aunt Marguerite's most recent princess and her most recent confusion of names. I could very easily tell you about **that**, since only three days ago we were treated to a whole barrel full of such errors.

We were taking a drive to Tempelhof with Herr von Schach, to which Auntie had to be invited because it was her day. You know that she's here every Tuesday as a house guest. So she was with us too in the “choich,” and when she saw some images of saints from the Catholic period, not only did she keep insisting on the extermination of superstition, but she also kept addressing herself to Schach with this concern as if he sat on the Church Council. Just now I have to lay down my pen (because I have either the virtue or the vice of seeing everything very graphically) to have a good laugh at that scene. But *au fond* [in reality] it's not nearly so ridiculous as it appears at first sight. There's something of the solemnity of Church councilman about him, and if I'm not completely mistaken, it's the very solemnness that sets Bülow so much against him. Much, much more than their differences of opinion.

And it almost sounds as if I were agreeing with Bülow in my description. Really, if you did not know any better, you would not be able to gather from this sketch of our friend just how highly I

32 Lake district in what is now Poland.

esteem him. Yes, more than ever, although the situation has its painful aspects. But in my state one learns to be gentle, to console oneself, to forgive. If I had **not** learned this, how could I live, **I**, who loves life so much! A weakness which (so I once read) all those are supposed to have of whom one would least suspect it.

But I spoke of some painful things, and I feel the necessity of telling you about them.

It happened yesterday on our walk. As we were doing the stretch between the village and the church, Schach walked with Mama. Not by chance: it was arranged, and to be precise, by **me**. I walked on ahead of them because I wanted to encourage an interchange between them (and you know **which** one I mean). Quiet evenings like that, when one walks across the fields and hears nothing but chiming of the evening bell, lift us above small concerns and make us freer. And once we feel freer, then the right words will come, too. I don't know what words were spoken, but in any case it wasn't what **should** have been said. Finally, we went inside the church; it was as if on fire from the redness of the evening sun and everything took on life and was unforgettably beautiful. On the way home Schach exchanged partners and escorted **me**. He spoke in a very pleasing way and in a tone that pleased as much as it surprised me. I haven't forgotten a single word of it, and it certainly makes me think. But what happened? When we had gotten back to the entrance to the village, he became more silent and waited for Mama. Then he offered **her** his arm and that's the way they went back through the village to the inn, where the coaches had stopped and lots of people had gathered. My feelings were hurt because I couldn't get rid of the thought that it would have been uncomfortable for him to appear among the guests at the inn with **me** on his arm. In his vanity (of which I cannot acquit him), he isn't able to disregard gossip, and a mocking smile will put him in a bad mood for a week. Self-confident as he is he's weak and dependent in this single regard. To no one in the world, not even to Mama, would I make such a confession, but I just had to make it to **you**.

If I'm wrong, just tell me that my unhappiness has made me distrustful; give me a reprimand in the sternest words possible, and be assured that I will read them gratefully. For despite all his vanity, I treasure him and appreciate him like no other. There is a saying that men may not be vain because vanity makes them appear ridiculous. To me this seems exaggerated. But if that saying is true, after all, then Schach is an exception to the rule. I hate the word "chivalrous" and yet I have no other word for him. There's **one** thing that he is even more: discreet, impressive, or at least full of natural respect; and if the thing I wish for Mama's sake and mine were to come to pass, it wouldn't be difficult for me to put myself in a position to give him due respect.

And one more thing. You never thought him very clever, and I defended him only timidly. But his intelligence is of the best kind, a golden mean, the kind that an upright man has. I notice this every time he carries on his feud with Bülow. No matter how much Bülow is superior to him, he is always beneath him. But it sometimes strikes me that the ill-will that broods within our friend gives him a certain ready wit, yes, even *esprit*. Yesterday he called Sander, whose personality you well know, a "Bülovian Sancho Panza." The further consequences of that statement are self-evident, and I think that it's not badly put.

Sander's publications are causing more of a stir than ever. The peculiar times we live in create an interest in a literature which is merely polemical. Besides Bülow's, there are now essays by Massenbach and Phull,³³ which are praised by the initiated as something special and never-before-seen. All of it is directed against Austria and proves the saying that the laugh is always on the loser. Schach is indignant about the "arrogance of presumptive knowledge," as he calls it, and has turned to his old interests again, etchings and horse racing. His little groom is getting smaller day by day. Small overall

33 Massenbach, 1758-1827, a Prussian officer, advised the King of Prussian in 1805-06 to form an alliance with France (against Russia). He committed grave errors at the battle of Jena as Hohenlohe's general quartermaster. Phull joined the army of Prussia from Württemberg and later joined Russian service as a military teacher of Czar Alexander I.

proportions in a groom means the same thing as small feet to the Chinese. I, for my part, react negatively toward both, but especially toward tiny bound feet and am quite happy to stick with my comfortable slippers. I will never be able to guide or direct him: that I leave to my dear Lisette. Do it with that gentleness that is yours. Remember me to your dear husband, whose only fault is to have taken you away from me. Mama sends her love and kisses to her darling Lisette, and in the fullness of the happiness you've found, do not forget her who seeks no more than her lawful share of happiness.

Your

Victoria"

VI.

Chez Prince Louis

On the same evening in which Victoria von Carayon wrote her letter to Lisette von Perbandt, Schach received at his apartment on Wilhelmstrasse a letter of invitation from the hand of Prince Louis.

It read:

"Dear Schach, I have been in the Moabite area for only three days and already I'm starved for company and conversation. To be a quarter of a mile **from** the capital is the same as being **out** of it, and one misses the city.

"Can I count on you for tomorrow? Bülow and his publicationary appendage have consented, as have Massenbach and Phull. As you see, it's all opposition forces, nothing but contrary opinions, but this refreshes me, even when I'm fighting them. Nostitz and Alvensleben will be here from your regiment. Evening coat and five o'clock. Yours, *Louis*, Prince of Pr[ussia]."

After picking up Nostitz and Alvensleben at the stipulated hour, Schach drove up in front of the Prince's villa. The villa, which lay on the right bank of the river, was surrounded by meadows and fields of goat-willow; its front looked across the Spree to the western edge of the Tiergarten.³⁴ Arrivals and entries took place in the rear. A wide stairway covered with carpeting led to a landing and thence to a foyer where the Prince's guests were received. Bülow and Sander were already there; Massenbach and Phull, on the other hand, had sent regrets. Schach was pleased by that since he found Bülow himself more than enough, and had no desire to see the number of geniuses increased. It was still broad daylight, but in the dining room, which they entered from the vestibule, the candles had already been lit and the blinds closed (although the windows were still open). The fire from the hearth in the middle of the room complemented the artificial light and the faint daylight from the outside. The prince sat with his back to the fireplace and looked out through the slats of the blinds at the trees in the Tiergarten.

"I beg you to make do," he began when the group had sat down to table. "We **are** in the country. That will have to serve as an excuse for all that's missing. '*A la guerre, comme à la guerre.*'"³⁵ Massenbach, our gourmet, must have suspected or rather feared something of this nature. Which wouldn't surprise me in the slightest. They do say, Sander, that the excellence of your table did more to

34 The zoological park in Berlin.

35 "In war, as in war," roughly, one must make the best of one's situation, or make do with what one has.

seal the bond of friendship between you than your publishing activities.”

“A statement which I hardly dare to contradict, Your Majesty.”

“And yet you really **have** to. There is nothing in your firm to suggest that '*laisser passer*'³⁶ which is the right, or indeed, the duty of all well-fed people. You geniuses (*pardon*, Bülow) all write as if they were underfed. But I don't care. I'll leave our showpiece writers to you, but I'm not pleased with your mistreatment of the Austrians.”

“Am I responsible, Your Majesty? I for my part make no pretense to a higher strategy. But while we're on this topic I would like to ask—in the name of the firm, so to speak—'Was the Ulm business a good move?'”

“What is a good move, my dear Sander? But do you know what Napoleon said about our deployment of troops in Thuringia last year? Nostitz you tell him! ... All right, he doesn't want to. Then I'll have to do it myself. '*Ah, ces Prussiens,*' he said, '*ils sont encore plus stupides que les Autrichiens.*'³⁷ There you have a comment on our much-praised cleverness, and what's more, criticism from a most noteworthy source. And if he were right, then we'd have to congratulate ourselves on the peace which Haugwitz finagled for us. Yes, **finagled**, by giving up our honor for a trinket. What can we do with Hanover? It is the crumb which will choke the Prussian eagle.”

“I have more confidence in our Prussian eagle's ability to swallow and digest,” Bülow countered. “That's the **one** thing it can do and has understood how to do for ages. Anyway, you could argue about **that**, but the one thing you **cannot** argue about is the peace Haugwitz brought about. We need it as much as we need our daily bread; we had to have it, our very lives depended upon it. No doubt Your Majesty dislikes, even hates poor Haugwitz, which surprises me since Lombard, who was behind it all, has found favor in Your Majesty's eyes!”

“Oh, Lombard! Him I don't take seriously, and do take into account that he is half French. Furthermore, he has a sense of humor that disarms me. You know, don't you, that his father was a *Friseur* [hair stylist] and the wife's father a *Barbier* [beard-trimmer]. And then there's his wife; her vanity alone could drive you crazy. And she writes bad French verse. She once asked him whether it was nicer to write '*l'hirondelle frise la surface des eaux*' or '*l'hirondelle rase la surface des eaux.*'³⁸ And what did he reply? 'I see no difference, my dear. *L'hirondelle frise* honors **my** father, *l'hirondelle rase* honors **yours**.' This *bon mot* captures the whole man. As for me personally, I confess openly that I can't resist such witty self-mockery. He is a *polisson* [ill-bred], not a person of quality.”

“Perhaps the same thing could be said of Haugwitz, for better or worse. Your Majesty may have captured the **man**, but **not** his politics. His politics are good because they reckon with known quantities. And your Majesty knows that better than I. What is the real truth about our military strength? We live from hand to mouth. And why? Because the state created by Frederick the Great is not a country with an army, but an army with a country. Our country is only a base camp and supplier of provisions. But itself it lacks all the important resources. When we win, then it's all right, but wars ought to be conducted only by countries that can survive defeat. And that we **cannot** do. If the army loses, then everything is lost. And we learned at Austerlitz just how quickly an army can be lost. A breath can kill us, **us** I mean. 'He blew, and the Armada vanished into the four winds.' *Afflavit Deus et dissipat sunt.*”³⁹

“Herr von Bülow, you must forgive me for making an observation,” Schach interrupted at this

36 To simply ignore or let something pass.

37 Oh, these Prussians! They're even more stupid than the Austrians.

38 French, the swallow grazes the surface of the water or shaves the surface.

39 *Afflavit*... Jehovah blew with his winds and they were scattered in all directions. Inscription on a Dutch coin struck in gratitude for the destruction of the Armada.

point. “He will certainly not wish to confuse the hellish vapors now wafting about the earth with the breath of God, not the breath of **Him** who blew the Armada asunder.”

“Yes, I **do**, Herr von Schach. Or do you really believe that the breath of God is in the special employ of Protestantism or even of Prussia and its army?”

“I hope it is.”

“And I fear it is **not**. We have a spit-and-polish army, that's all. But you can't win battles with neatness. Does Your Majesty remember the words of the great king when General Lehwald paraded his thrice-defeated regiments before him? 'Proper folk,' he said. “Now look at **my** men. They look like grasshoppers, but they can **sting**.' I'm afraid we have too many Lehwald regiments now and too few kings like old Frederick the Great. The spirit is gone, it's become drills and game playing. And there still are officers who wear their uniforms right next to their skin so that it looks tighter and more close-fitting. It's all too unnatural. Just being able to march—the normal human capability of lifting ones legs—even this we have lost by all the goose stepping and ceremonial. And marching has become the first requirement for success. All modern battles have been won with the legs.”

“And with **gold**,” the PRince interrupted. “Your great **Emperor**, my dear Bülow, has a penchant for the least expenditure, for the very least. It is certain that he lies. But he's also a master in the art of bribery. And who opened our eyes to that? He himself. Read what he said right before the Battle of Austerlitz. 'Soldier,' it went, 'the enemy is going to attack and try to break down our flank, but as he does this he will abandon his own flank. We shall throw ourselves at his flank, rout and destroy him!' And that is exactly how the battle went. There is no way that he could have guessed the Austrians' battle plan merely from their formation.”

They fell silent. But since this silence was more painful to the vivacious prince than contradiction, he turned directly to Bülow and said, “Refute that, if you can.”

“Your Majesty commands, and so I obey. The Emperor knew exactly what would happen, he was **able** to answer it because in calculating fashion he had not only posed, but also answered the question, 'what would mediocrity do in this situation?' Great stupidity, one must admit, is as unpredictable as great intelligence—that is one of the good aspects of genuine and unpretended stupidity. But “moderately clever” people are just bright enough to be tempted by the desire 'to have their go at something more intellectual'; they are always the easiest to predict. And why? Because they always follow the prevailing fashion and copy today what they saw yesterday. And the *Emperor* was aware of all that. *Hic haeret*.⁴⁰ He never proved his worth more splendidly than he did in the Austerlitz affair, not in minor matters, nor even in his improvisations and spontaneous ideas that bordered on the grotesque, which are so truly the sign of genius.”

“An example, if you please.”

“One will stand for a hundred. When the center had been broken through, one part of the Russian guard, four bataillons, retreated over as many frozen ponds, and a French battery started firing on them with case-shots. At this moment the *Emperor* appeared. He realized at a glance what was unusual about the situation. ‘Why are you wearing yourselves out with details?’ And he ordered them to shoot at the **ice** with cannon balls. One minute later the ice burst and broke and all four battalions went down *en carré* [as a group] into the muddy depths. Only real genius is capable of lightning insights generated by the moment. Now you can be sure that the Russians will attempt to do exactly the same thing at the first opportunity, but if Kutusow⁴¹ waits for ice, he'll find himself in water or fire instead. I admire Austro-Russian valor, but not their ingenuity. Somewhere I once read, 'In my knapsack the devil's sexton is stirring, a gremlin called genius.'⁴² Well, in the Russo-Austrian knapsack

40 Latin. And that's where it stops.

41 Russian general (1745-1813) with more education than talent.

42 Paraphrase of a poem by Gottfried August Bürger, in *Neue Weltliche Hochdeutsche Reime*.

this 'gremlin and devil's acolyte' has never felt at home. And to explain this deficit they use two wretched old excuses, corruption and betrayal. Losers always find it difficult to see the cause of their defeat in its sole source, namely in themselves, and even Emperor Alexander neglected to do that kind of personal reflection."

"And who could blame him for it?" Schach answered. "He did his part, even more. When the high point was already past, and yet on the other hand the possibility of recapturing the field had not yet disappeared, he went ahead, leading new troops to the sound of drums and trumpets. His horse was shot out from under him; he mounted another and the battle raged for another thirty minutes. Genuine miracles of bravery were performed, and even the French had to give their enthusiastic recognition."

The Prince, who on the occasion of the Emperor's presence in Berlin the previous year had not been too favorably impressed by this man, praised by everyone as a *deliciae generis humani*,⁴³ was now rather uncomfortable to see this "delight of mankind" raised to the status of "most heroic." For this reason he smiled and said, "With all due respect to His Imperial Majesty, it does seem to me, my dear Schach, as though you're giving more importance to French newspaper reports than they **deserve**. The French are clever people. The more highly they praise their enemies, the greater becomes their own fame, not to mention all the possible political factors which no doubt motivate them. 'Build your enemy bridges of gold,' runs the proverb, and justly so, because today's enemy could be tomorrow's ally. And indeed, there's already something of that in the air; if I am correctly informed, discussions are already underway about a new division of the world, I mean about the restoration of the eastern and western empires. But let's not trouble ourselves with things which are still up in the air; instead, we can explain the praise the hero-emperor received from this principle: 'If the courage of the defeated Russians weighed a full hundredweight, then the victorious French spirit naturally weighed **two** hundred.'"

Schach, who had been wearing a St. Andrew's Cross since Emperor Alexander's visit to Berlin, had held his tongue and wanted to reply. But Bülow beat him to it and remarked, "I am always suspicious of 'horses shot out from under the emperor.' And especially in this case. All this high praise must have embarrassed His Majesty very much, because there are too many things that could prove the opposite. He is 'Alexander the Good,' period."

"You say that so mockingly, Herr von Bülow," Schach answered. "And yet I ask you, is there any better title?"

"Oh, certainly there is. A **truly** great man is never celebrated because of his goodness, and named after it even less. Rather, he will be the object of constant calumny. Because commonness, which everywhere predominates, appreciates only that which is like itself. Brenkenhoff,⁴⁴ who for all his paradoxes ought to be more widely read than he is, maintains plainly that 'in our age the best men would necessarily have the worst reputations.' The good emperor! Oh, come now. What a face Frederick the Great would have made if people had called him 'Frederick the good.'"

"Bravo, Bülow," said the Prince and raised his glass. "Perfectly put. My thoughts exactly."

But the Prince's approval was hardly necessary. "All kings," Bülow continued with increasing zeal, "all kings bearing the appellation 'the Good' have either brought the realms entrusted to them to their graves, or have brought them at least to the brink of revolution. The last king of Poland⁴⁵ was supposedly a 'good' one. As a rule such princely personages have large harems and small brains. And if a war comes along, some Cleopatra will have to go with them, with or without the asp."

"But surely you don't think, Herr von Bülow," Schach countered, "that by utterances such as

43 Title applied to Titus, Roman emperor 79-81 C. E.

44 Franz Balthazar Schönberg von Brenkenhoff (1723-17880), minister of finance under Frederick the Great.

45 Stanislaus II. August (1732-1798), forced to resign in 1795.

these you have characterized Emperor Alexander.”

“Approximately, at least.”

“Well, that piques my curiosity.”

“In this connection one need only recall the last visit of the Emperor to Berlin and Potsdam. What was the issue there? Well, everybody knew it was no small and ordinary matter, but the conclusion of a pact of vital seriousness,⁴⁶ and indeed, they entered the tomb of Frederick the Great by candlelight to swear a kind of half-mystical blood-brotherhood over his very grave. And what happened immediately thereafter? Three days had not passed before it was being said that the Czar, successfully risen from the crypt of Frederick the Great into the light of day, had organized the five most admired beauty-queens of the court into five categories of beauty: *beauté coquette* and *beauté triviale*, *beauté celeste*, and *beauté du diable*, and finally '*beauté, que inspire seul du vrai sentiment*.'⁴⁷ No doubt everyone was keen to make the acquaintance of the highest level, that is '*vrai sentiment*.'”

VII.

Another Guest Arrives

All of Bülow's sallies had left the Prince in high spirits, and he was about to make an easy joke about *beauté celeste* and *beauté du diable* when he saw a small, familiar gentleman of undeniably artistic habits appear out in the hallway under the parted curtains at the door.

“Ah, Dussek,⁴⁸ that's marvelous,” the Prince greeted him. “*Mieux vaut tard que jamais*. [Better late than never.] Come on in and join us. And now let everything left in the way of sweets be put within reach of our artist friend. You'll still find *tutti quanti* [everything, plenty left], dear Dussek. No objections, please. But what will you have to drink? It's your choice. Asti, Montefiascone, Tokay?”

“Some kind of Hungarian wine.”

“A dry one?”

Dussek smiled.

“A nonsensical question,” the Prince corrected himself and continued in even better humor. “But now, Dussek, talk to us. Theater people have all kinds of little virtues, Virtue itself excluded, and among them is communicativeness. Ask them 'What's new?' and they rarely fail to deliver.”

“Nor shall you lack for news tonight, Your Majesty,” answered Dussek, taking first a sip of wine and then straightening his goatee.

“Well, let's hear it. What's at the top of your list?”

“The whole town is in an uproar. You understand, of course, when I say 'the whole town,' I mean the theater.”

“The theater **is** the town. You're right. So, go on.”

“At Your Majesty's command. Well, then, we have been emotionally injured by a slap at our leader and chief, and for this very reason we have had something just short of a minor mutiny in the theater. **Such** are the times now, the rumor goes, and **that** is middle-class administration and **that** is the respect they pay to Prussian '*belles lettres et beaux arts*' [arts and letters]. They were content with “The

46 The “Holy Alliance” of 1815.

47 French. Enumeration of five types of beauty. *Beauté coquette*, teasing or flirting beauty; *beauté triviale*, beauty of no consequence or trivial; *beauté celeste*, celestial beauty; *beauté du diable*, beauty that is sexually attractive, but not by the usual standards; *beauté, que inspire seul du vrai sentiment*, beauty that inspires true feelings or emotions.

48 Dussek (1761-1812), orchestra director and composer for piano.

Homage of the Arts,”⁴⁹ saying anything against the arts was still an alien concept to them.”

“My dear Dussek,” the Prince interrupted, “with all due respect for your reflections on the matter, I must ask you—since you happened to be speaking of art—not to exaggerate the art of the slow delivery. The facts, if you please. What is it all about?”

“Iffland has fallen. He is **not** going to get the medal of honor about which there has been so much talk.”

Everyone laughed, Sander the most heartily, and Nostitz scanned “*Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.*”⁵⁰

But Dussek was in quite a state of excitement, which only increased under the influence of the jovial mood of his audience. Sander annoyed him the most. “You laugh, Sander. Among the present company this affair touches only you and me. For against whom is the sharp end directed if not the middle class as a whole?”

The Prince offered the speaker his hand across the table. “You’re right, dear Dussek. I like the way you get involved. Tell us more. How did it happen?”

“Above all completely unexpectedly. Like a bolt out of the blue. Your Majesty knows that there has been talk of a decoration for a long time, and we were happy about it—forgetting for a moment all jealousies between artists, as if we were going to receive and wear the medal, too. In fact, everything was going well, and the ‘Consecration of Strength,’⁵¹ which the court was interested in staging, was supposed to furnish both the impetus and the special occasion. Iffland is a Mason, you know, and the loge was actively promoting it, and the Queen had been won over. But he failed all the same! What does it matter, you might say. But no, gentlemen, it does indeed matter. That kind of thing is always like a straw in the wind that shows you which way the wind is blowing. And here it’s blowing in the same old direction it’s always been blowing. *Chi va piano va sano*,⁵² says the proverb. But in Prussia one says ‘*pianissimo*’.”

“He is ruined, you say, Dussek. But ruined by what?”

“By the influence of the generals at court. I head Rüchel’s⁵³ name mentioned. He played the scholar and pointed out the lowly position of actors through world history, with the sole exception of Nero’s time. But **his** times couldn’t be anyone’s model. That helped. What ‘most Christian king’ would wish to be a Nero or even to hear his name. And so we know that for the present, the matter has been put *ad acta* [tabled, shelved]. The Queen is annoyed, but for the present we will have to be content with this royal vexation. It’s a new age, but we live with the old prejudices.”

“My dear *Kapellmeister*,” Bülow said, “I’m sorry to say that your thoughts on this matter are more progressive than your own feelings. I might add that this is generally the case. You talk about **our** prejudices, but you have them yourself as well. You and all your middle-class friends don’t want to create a new and free social order; no, you struggle vainly and jealously among the old, privileged classes. But that’s no way to go about it. The petty jealousy which now gnaws at the heart of the third estate must be replaced by an indifference to all this childishness, which has simply outlived its usefulness. If you truly ignore ghosts, then they no longer exist for you; and if you take no notice of honors, then you are working for their elimination. And that would be the real cure for the epidemic....”

“Just as Herr von Bülow is working in the other direction to establish a new utopian monarchy,”

49 Allusion to a poem by Friedrich Schiller.

50 “The mountains are in labor and a ridiculous mouse shall be brought forth. Horace.

51 Iffland’s play, Martin Luther, oder die Weihe der Kraft [Luther or the Consecration of Strength].

52 Slow and steady wins the race.

53 Rüchel (1754-1823), Prussian general, last and most important disciple of Frederick the Great.

Sander interrupted. "As far as I am concerned, I assume for the time being that the illness of which he speaks will continue to spread further and further from east to west, but it will not die away in the opposite direction. Moreover, in my imagination I see more and more new permutations, the flowering of a giant 'medal plant' with 24 classes as in Linné's system."⁵⁴

Everyone took sides with Sander, the Prince more decisively than anyone. They thought there had to be something in human nature, which, like the inclination to jewelry and finery, for example, is attracted to such this kind of hardware. "Exactly," the Prince continued, "and no degree of intelligence protects against it. I'm sure you all regard Kalckreuth⁵⁵ as a clever man, a man among the few, moreover, who comprehended that "all is vanity" saturates all our aims and actions. And yet, when he received the less prestigious Order of the Red Eagle instead of the higher-ranking Black Eagle that he had expected, he threw it into a drawer furiously, shouting 'Lie there until you **turn** black.' A change in color which after a time actually did occur."

"Kalckreuth is a peculiar case," Bülow replied, "and to tell the truth, I am more pleased by another of our generals who supposedly said, 'I would give up a Black Eagle just to get rid of my Red Eagle.' I might add that I am less strict than appearance would indicate. **Not** to recognize some decorations would simply indicate narrowness or baseness. Admiral Sidney Smith, the famous defender of St. Jean d'Acre⁵⁶ and someone who despised all honors, **did** value one decoration that the bishop of Acre gave him. In bestowing it the Bishop said 'We received this decoration from the hands of King Richard the Lion-Hearted, and return it, after six hundred years, to one of his compatriots, who as heroic as he, defended our city.' And he is a wretch and a fool, I might add, who could **not** rejoice over a decoration like **that**."

"How happy I am to hear those words coming from you," the Prince replied. "It strengthens my feelings for you, dear Bülow, and, if you don't mind, it's one more proof that the devil isn't half as black as he's painted."

The Prince was about to continue, but since at that very moment one of the servants came up to him and whispered that the smoking table was ready and that coffee was being served, he bade his guests rise, and taking Bülow by the arm, he led them to the balcony just off the dining room. A large blue and white striped awning, its rings clattering gaily in the wind, had been let down, and from under its long hanging fringes they could look upstream to the towers of the city, now half-shrouded in mist; downstream they could see the trees of Charlottenburg Park where the sun was setting behind the newly greening branches. Everyone stared silently at the charming landscape, and not until twilight when a tall sinumbra lamp⁵⁷ had been brought in did they take their seats and light Dutch pipes, chosen by each man to his own liking. Only Dussek, who knew the Prince's passion for music, had remained inside in the dining room, extemporizing at the grand piano; and only when he turned his head to the side did he see his table companions chatting excitedly again as sparks occasionally flew up from their clay pipes.

The conversation had not picked up on the theme of medals again, but had turned rather to the cause, namely Iffland and the new play upon which attention had been focused. Alvensleben seized the opportunity to remark, "that in the last few days he had heard some of the vocal selections from the play. Together with Schach. At the salon of dear Frau von Carayon and Victoria, in fact. The daughter sang and Schach accompanied."

"The Carayons," the Prince began, "I hear no name more often now than **that** one. My dear

54 Linné (1707-78) divided plants into classes, orders, genus, species, and varieties.

55 Friedrich Adolf Graf von Kalckreuth (22 February 1737 – 10 June 1818) was a Prussian Generalfeldmarschall.

56 In 1799 Admiral Sir Sidney Smith undertook the defence of Saint-Jean d'Acre (3 March–8 May) and heroically repulsed Napoleon.

57 Sinumbra ("without shadow") lamps were circular oil lamps that produced few shadows.

friend Pauline told me about those two ladies some time ago, and recently Rahel⁵⁸ did too. As a result, I'm curious, and am trying to make their acquaintance, which, I think, will not be too difficult to do. I do seem to remember lovely Fräulein von Massow's children's ball, which like all such occasions had the advantage of offering a very special display of the most mature and fully-blossomed beauties. And when I say 'fully-blossomed' that is an understatement. In fact, I never see more lovely thirty-year-olds anywhere. It's as though the presence of youth, yearning consciously or unconsciously for revolution, doubly and trebly incited all the ruling forces to re-enforce their establishment power, a status which may very soon disappear. But no matter, gentlemen, the one thing that can be said with certainty, is that formal dances for children are solely for adults, and tracing this phenomenon to its sources would really be a theme for our friend Gentz.⁵⁹ Your philosophical friend Buchholtz,⁶⁰ Sander, isn't graceful enough at this game for me. Please don't take offense—he is your friend, I know.”

“But we aren't so close,” Sander laughed, “that I wouldn't be ready at any moment to sacrifice him to Your Royal Majesty. And, if I might be permitted on this occasion to say so, not merely for some very special principle, but also for a very common one. For dances held for children, as Your Majesty Himself has seen, are actually improved by the absence of children, so to do friendships survive better in the absence of friends. Surrogates are the most important thing in life, after all, and are in a peculiar way the essence of wisdom.”

“Things must be going very well for you indeed, dear Sander,” the Prince responded, “if you can publicly confess to such enormities. *Mais revenons à notre belle Victoire*.⁶¹ She was among the young ladies who opened that festival with *tableaux vivantes*, and played, if I remember correctly, Hebe,⁶² offering the cup to Zeus. Yes, that's how it was, and just talking about it brings back the scene most clearly to my mind. She was hardly fifteen and had one of those pinched waists that look as if they might shatter at any moment. But they never do. ‘*Comme un ange*’ [like an angel], said old Count von Neale, who was standing next to me and boring me with his enthusiasm, which I saw as a caricature of my own. I would love to have a chance to renew the ladies' acquaintance.”

“Your Majesty would not recognize Fräulein Victoria now,” said Schach, who found the Prince's tone of voice disagreeable. “Just after the Massow's ball she was stricken by smallpox and was only saved as if by a miracle. There is still a certain charm in her appearance, but only in those moments when the rare loveliness of her nature casts a veil of beauty over her and seems to restore her earlier magic.”

“Thus a *restitutio in integrum* [restoration to the original condition],” said Sander.

Everyone laughed.⁶³

“Yes, if it pleases you to call it that,” Schach answered sharply, bowing ironically towards Sander.

The Prince noticed the discord and moved to end it. “Nothing can help you, Schach, old man. You speak as if you were trying to scare me off. But you've certainly missed the mark. For I ask you, what is beauty? It's one of the most vague concepts of all. Do I need to remind you of the five categories for which we first must thank His Majesty Czar Alexander and, secondly, our friend Bülow? **Everything** is beautiful and **nothing** is. I myself would always prefer the *beauté du diable*, that is to say, a manifestation of beauty which more or less coincides with that of the *ci-devant* [formerly]

58 Presumably Rahel Varnhagen, German writer and host of a famous salon in Berlin.

59 Gentz (1764-1832), important publicist, author of *Reflection on the Origin and Character of the War Against the French Revolution*.

60 Probably Ludwig Heinrich Buchholtz (1740-1811), Prussian diplomat.

61 French. But let's get back to the subject of our beautiful Victoria.

62 Goddess of youth in Greek mythology.

63 Presumably the laughter was the result of a Latin legal term being applied to loss of physical appearance.

beautiful Fräulein von Carayon.”

“May it please Your Royal Majesty,” Nostitz answered,”but I question whether Your Majesty would perceive the signs of *beauté du diable* in Fräulein Victoria. The young lady has a tone at once witty and elegiac; at first sight this seems to be a contradiction in terms, but it isn't, and can always be recognized as her characteristic trait. Don't you agree, Alvensleben?”

Alvensleben assented.

Meanwhile the Prince, who was inordinately fond of digging into issues, continued, indulging his inclination yet again and becoming more and more vivacious: “‘Elegiac,’ you say, ‘witty and elegiac.’ I can think of nothing that would better suit a *beauté du diable*. Your definition of the concept is obviously too narrow, gentlemen. Everything you imagine under that label is merely a variation of the most common, the most quotidian form of beauty, the *beauté coquette*: her little nose slightly more turned up, her complexion somewhat darker, a bit more lively in temperament, in manners a little bolder and more reckless. But with that you have by no means exhausted the higher form of *beauté du diable*. The latter has something more encompassing about it, something that goes far beyond mere questions of complexion or ethnicity. Just like the Catholic Church. Both are moved by something internal, and this inwardness that provides the answer to **our** question, is energy, fire, passion.”

Nostitz and Sander smiled and nodded.

“Yes, gentlemen, and let me go further and repeat, ‘What is beauty?’ Beauty, bah! One can very easily do without the common forms of beauty; indeed, the absence of them can even be a very practical advantage. To be sure, Schach, old man, I have seen miraculous defeats and even more miraculous victories. In matters of love things proceed as at Morgarten and Sempach,⁶⁴ where handsome knights were beaten and ugly peasants triumphed. Believe me, the heart makes the final decision and **only** the heart. Whoever **can** love can **be** loved, and it would be terrible if it were any other way. Go down the list of your own experiences. What's more common than seeing a beautiful wife cast aside for a less beautiful mistress? And that's not simply the rule of *toujours perdrix* [always partridges].⁶⁵ Oh, no. The relationship is much more complex. The most boring thing in the world is the lymphatic-phlegmatic beauty, the *beauté par excellence* [exceptional beauty]. This kind of beauty suffers from something or another most of the time, I won't say always or necessarily but in the majority of cases, while my *beauté du diable* enjoys the best of health, a condition which means everything to us in the final analysis and is as valuable as the greatest attractiveness. And now I ask you, gentlemen, who would have more of that quality than someone who had gone through a purifying process as powerful as purgatory? There's nothing more attractive than a few pit marks in the cheeks; that was the case even with the Greeks and Romans, and I am not so ungallant or illogical as to deny honor and respect to many pit marks when one or two have been granted the same since antiquity. The paradox ‘*le laid c'est le beau*’ [ugliness is beauty] is completely justified, and it means nothing less than that a higher form of beauty is concealed behind seeming ugliness. If only my dear Pauline were here, as she unfortunately is not, she would agree with me, openly and emphatically without being swayed by personal histories.”

The Prince fell silent. It was obvious that he was waiting for a unanimous expression of regret that Frau Pauline, who from time to time did the honors of the house, was **not** present on this occasion. But when no one broke the silence, he continued: “When the ladies are absent, our wine and our lives lack effervescence. Let me repeat that it would make me quite happy to welcome the Carayon ladies in the salon of my friend Pauline. I will count on those gentlemen who frequent Frau von Carayon's circle

64 Morgarten, 15 November 1315, victory of Swiss towns over Austria; Sempach, 9 July 1386, victory of Swiss peasants against the Austrian knight army.

65 Said to be a complaint of the confessor to Henri IV when the king had partridges served to the confessor every day in response to the confessor's reproaches about the king's many affairs.

to appoint themselves as interpreters of my wishes. You, Schach, or even you, dear Alvensleben.”

Both bowed.

“All things considered, it will probably be best for my friend Pauline to take the matter into her own hands. I imagine that she will first visit the Carayon ladies, and I look forward to hours of the most spirited intellectual exchange.”

The embarrassed silence that followed these last words would have been even more noticeable had not Dussek stepped out onto the balcony at that very moment. “How beautiful,” he exclaimed, and pointed to the western horizon, suffused with an intense yellow light.

They had all stepped over to the railing of the balcony and gazed downstream into the evening sky. Tall poplars stood dark and silent in front of the yellow strip of light, and even the dome of the castle seemed a mere silhouette.

Every one of them was touched by this beauty. Most beautiful, however, was the sight of countless swans in a long line paddling up from Charlottenburg Park while the guests were staring at the sky. Others had already settled in front of the villa. Evidently the whole flotilla had been lured to the vicinity of the palace by something, for as soon as they were squarely in front of it, they wheeled round militarily and lengthened the line of those who already rested as if at anchor, silent and motionless with their beaks buried beneath their feathers. Only the reeds behind them moved gently. Thus some time passed. Finally one of the swans appeared right in front of the balcony and stretched his neck, as if he wanted to say something.

“Who's he talking to?” Sander asked. “The Prince, or Dussek, or the sinumbra lamp?”

“The Prince, naturally,” Dussek answered.

“Why is that?”

“Because he is not merely a prince, but also 'Dussek' and 'sine umbra'.”

Everyone laughed (the Prince included), while Sander formally congratulated Dussek on being named 'Hofkapellmeister' [orchestra director to the court]. “And when in the future,” he concluded, “our friend again gathers straws to see 'which way the wind blows', then the wind will always seem to be blowing in his direction from the land of hallowed traditions and not from the land of prejudices.”

While Sander continued speaking in this vein, the flotilla of swans, which had no doubt been attracted by Dussek's music, started moving again and sailed downstream, in the same matter that it had come upstream. Only the leader of the herd appeared before them once more, as if he wanted to repeat his thanks and to take his leave with as much ceremony as possible. Then he too took to the middle of the stream and followed the others, as the head of the group had already disappeared in the shadows of the trees in the park.

VIII.

Schach and Victoria

Shortly after that soirée at the Prince's it became common knowledge in Berlin that the King would be coming up from Potsdam before the end of the week to review the troops on Tempelhof Field. This bit of news aroused more than usual interest, because the whole population not only mistrusted the peace which Haugwitz had brought back home, but also became more and more convinced that ultimately its own strength could be its only security, that is, its salvation. But what force did we have—other than the army—the army, which, as far as appearance and training were concerned, was still the army of Frederick the Great.

Such was the mood as the population waited for the inspection of troops due to take place on a

Saturday.

From early morning on, the city was the very image of excitement in the air. Thousands streamed out of doors and lined the street from the Halle Gate on; along both sides of the way, the “skinflints,” those familiar civilian providers of drink, had set up shop with their baskets and bottles. Soon afterwards carriages belonging to the genteel world appeared, among them Schach's, which had been placed at the Carayons' disposal for the day. In the same coach with them was a certain old Herr von der Recke, formerly an officer, who as a close relative of Schach did the honors and at the same time explained the military proceedings.

Frau von Carayon wore a steel-gray silk dress and a mantilla of the same color; the blue veil of Victoria's wide-brimmed straw hat fluttered in the wind. Schach's groom sat next to the coachman and enjoyed the attention paid to him by the two ladies, and especially the rather oddly accented words that Victoria directed at him now and again.

The arrival of the King had been announced for eleven o'clock, but long before that the infantry regiments which had been ordered to appear for inspection—Old Larish, von Arnim, and Mollendorff, proceeded by their janissary music—had already arrived. They were followed by the cavalry: Garde du Corps, Gensdarmes and the King's Hussars, and at the end, in a cloud of dust which became thicker and thicker, the six- and twelve-pound cannons, some of which had seen service at Prague and Leuthen⁶⁶ and had more recently thundered at Valmy and at Pirmasens,⁶⁷ rumbled and clattered along. The advance of the troops was greeted with enthusiastic cheering, and in truth, anyone who watched the troops march by like that must have felt his own heart beat more rapidly with patriotic pride. The Carayons, too, partook of the general mood, and thought it merely due to bad humor or an old man's nervousness when old Herr von der Recke leaned forward and said in an emotional voice, “Take a good look at the sight, ladies. For an old man's foreboding tells you that we shall not again see such splendor. This is the last time we'll see Frederick's army pass in review.”

Victoria had caught a slight cold on Tempelhof Field and stayed at home in their apartment when Mama went to the theater in late afternoon; this was a pleasure she had always enjoyed, but at no time more than now when artistic inspiration and comfortable political emotions walked hand in hand. “Wallenstein,” “The Maid of Orleans,” and “William Tell” were occasionally produced, Holberg's “The Pewterer Turned Politician” most often, however, since it was, as management and audience jointly felt, significantly better at inciting noisy outbursts than was Schiller's muse.⁶⁸

Victoria was alone. The quiet did her good, and she lay dreaming on the sofa, wrapped in a Turkish shawl, with a letter before her which she had received just before departure that morning and had read only hurriedly then. She read it now much more attentively and slowly after she had returned from the spectacle.

It was a letter from Lisette.

She picked it up again and read a section which she had earlier marked with a pencil: “...I have to tell you, Victoria, dear, and please excuse this frank confession, that I do not lend full credence to all you told me in your last letter. You're attempting to fool yourself and me when you imagine that your relationship to S[chach] is merely one of respect. He would smile, too, if he heard that. That you suddenly feel so wounded, yes, pardon me, that you could feel so piqued when he took your mother's arm, that betrays you, and causes me to wonder, as do so many of the other things you wrote about in this connection. Suddenly I come to understand one side of your nature that I hadn't known before, namely, the suspicious side. And now, dear Victoria, kindly listen to what I have to say to you concerning this important matter. After all, I am older than you. You really cannot go around nurturing

66 Prague, 6 May 1757; Leuthen, 5 December 1757.

67 20 September 1792 and 14 September 1783, respectively.

68 The three plays first mentioned are by Friedrich Schiller.

your feelings of mistrust for people who deserve just the opposite from you. And Schach would number among these people, I should think. And the more I consider the matter, it seems to me that you are facing a decision: you must give up either your good opinion of S. or your distrust of him. You wrote me that he was a 'cavalier,' you even added something about chivalry being his very nature, and while writing that, you accuse him of behavior, which, if it were true, would be the most unchivalrous in the world. Such contradictions do not exist. One is either a man of honor, or one is not. In other respects, dear Victoria, be of good cheer. You may be certain of one thing: **you cannot trust the looking glass**. We women have only **one** purpose in living: we live in order to win a heart, but **how** we win it doesn't matter."

Victoria folded the sheet. "How easy it is to advise and console when one has everything. Now that she has everything she can be magnanimous. Crumbs from the rich man's table."

And she covered her eyes with her hands.

At the same moment she heard the doorbell; soon it rang a second time and still none of the servants answered it. Had Beate and old Jannasch possibly not heard it? Or were they out? She was filled with curiosity. Very quietly she crept to the door and looked out through the glass door. It was Schach. For a second she hesitated, wondering what to do, but then she opened the door and asked him to come in.

"You rang so quietly. Beate probably didn't hear it."

"I only stopped by to ask how the ladies were faring. We had marvelous weather for the parade, cool and sunny, but the wind was a bit bracing . . ."

"And you're looking at one of its victims. I have a temperature, not very high, but high enough to keep me from going to the theater. So please excuse me while I put my shawl back on. Beate expects a real miracle from her herbal tea. These two things will probably do me more good than 'Wallenstein's Death.'⁶⁹ At first Mama was going to keep me company. But you know how she adores anything having to do with the theater, so I sent her out. But partly out of selfishness, too, because admittedly I needed some peace and quiet."

"And now my presence is keeping you from it. But not for long, just long enough to execute a commission, an inquiry which may very possibly come too late—if Alvensleben has already spoken to you about it."

"I think he has not, unless it has to do with some matter which Mama thought it best I know nothing of."

"That would be most unlikely since it is a request that concerns both mother **and** daughter. We were having dinner at the Prince's, *cercle intime* [small, private gathering]. Dussek was naturally the last to arrive. He talked about the theater (what else would he talk about?) and even silenced Bülow, which is something of a feat."

"You are indulging in slander, dear Schach."

"I have spent enough time in Frau von Carayon's salon to have mastered at least the rudiments of that art."

"You're getting worse and worse, one heresy after another. I'll have you brought before Mama's Grand Inquisition. And you shall at least not escape the torture of a sermon on good manners."

"I can think of no punishment I'd rather endure."

"You're taking it too lightly . . . But what about the Prince....?"

"He wants to see you, **both** of you, mother and daughter. Frau Pauline, who, as you may know, takes care of the Prince's social affairs, is supposed to present you with an invitation."

"Which to accept both mother and daughter will consider a special honor."

69 Third part of Schiller's Wallenstein trilogy.

"That surprises me somewhat. And, my dear Victoria, I hardly think that you can be serious about it. The Prince has been good to me, and I love him *de tout mon coeur* [with all my heart]. Nothing more need be said about that. But he is a light that casts a long shadow, or, if you will pardon the comparison, he is a light that burns with a long, smoking wick. To put it briefly, like so many sovereigns he has the questionable advantage of being equally excellent in love and war; or to put it more bluntly, he is alternately a princely hero and a princely debaucher. At the same time, unscrupulous and careless of the consequences, even without regard for appearances. And that is perhaps the worst. You know of his relationship to Frau Pauline?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"I don't approve. But not approving is different from condemning. Mama has taught me not to worry and fret about things like that. And don't you think she's right? I ask you, Schach, what would become of us—after all, we're two **women**—if we were to set ourselves up as censor of public morals within our social sphere and try to judge both male and female of the species by the propriety of their conduct? Maybe by an ordeal by water and fire? Society has the final say. Whatever it permits is acceptable, whatever it rejects is unacceptable. And besides, everything about this case is most unusual. The Prince is a prince, Frau von Carayon is a widow, and I . . . I am myself."

"Then that's your final answer, Victoria?"

"Yes. The gods will straighten things out. And as Lisette Perbandt just wrote me, 'Today's loss is tomorrow's gain.' In my case the loss has been somewhat painful, and I certainly wish it hadn't happened; but on the other hand, while I cannot forget about the good that I've lost, still I'm happy about the freedom I've gained. What others of my age and sex fear, that **I** may do. That evening at the Massows, the first time people paid me their respects, I was a slave without being conscious of it. Or at least dependent on a hundred things. Now I'm free."

Schach looked at the speaker in amazement. Many of the things the Prince had said about her were going through his mind. Had she spoken from conviction or on the spur of the moment? Her cheeks had flushed, and the lightning fire in her eyes struck him with an expression of stubborn resolve. Nevertheless, he tried to recover the unserious tone with which their conversation had begun. "My Victoria is joking. I'll bet she's been reading Rousseau, and her phantasy has followed the writer."

"No, it's not Rousseau. There's another writer that interests me even **more**."

"And who is it, if I may be so curious as to ask?"

"Mirabeau."⁷⁰

"And why is he **more** interesting?"

"Because I find him more sympathetic. And the most subjective factors always determine our judgments. Or at least almost always. He is my companion, my special partner in suffering. He grew up with flattery. 'Oh, what a lovely child!' was all he heard for years. And then one day it was all over, just like . . . like . . ."

"No, Victoria, you shouldn't say such things."

"But I **want** to. And if I could I would even adopt the surname of my companion and partner: Victoria **Mirabeau** de Carayon, or how about **Mirabelle** de Carayon, that sounds nice and free, and if I translate correctly, it means 'marvelously gracious.'"

Then she laughed at her own bravado and her bitterness. But the bitterness was the more evident of the two.

"You shouldn't permit yourself **that** kind of laughter, Victoria. Not like that. It doesn't become you, it makes you less attractive. Yes, go ahead and pout, but it does make you less attractive. The

70 A French revolutionist, notably unattractive.

Prince was right, after all, when he spoke enthusiastically of you. How pitiful are our rules for form and color. The only true and lasting rule is that the soul creates itself a body, or illuminates and transfigures it.”

Victoria's lips trembled, her composure deserted her, and she was shaken by a chill. She drew her shawl closer around her, and Schach took her hand, which was as cold as ice because all her blood had rushed to her heart.

“Victoria, you're doing yourself an injustice. You storm out against yourself and are not a whit better off for it than the pessimist who goes looking for the gloomy side of things and overlooks God's bright sunlight. I beg you, take hold of yourself and believe again in your **right** to life and love. Was I really blind? With that bitter word with which you tried to denigrate yourself, with that very word you have perfectly captured it. Everything about you is fairytale-like and miraculous. 'Mirabelle' is perfect, 'miraculously gracious' indeed!”

Ah, those were the words which her heart had been longing to hear while in defiance it sought to arm itself. And now she heard them meekly, and fell silent in sweet intoxication.

The clock on the wall struck nine and the tower clock outside answered. Victoria, who had heard each stroke, tidied up her hair, stepped up to the window and looked out at the street.

“What are you looking for?”

“I thought I heard Mama's carriage.”

“You're listening too carefully.”

But she shook her head, and just then Frau von Carayon's carriage did drive up.

“Leave me now Please.”

“Until tomorrow then.”

And without knowing whether he could successfully avoid meeting Frau von Carayon, he hurriedly took his leave and slipped away through the ante-chamber and hallway.

Downstairs everything was quiet and dark; only a glimmer of light from the middle of the hallway reached the top steps. But luck was with him. A large pillar, which jutted out almost to the edge of the stairway, divided the entry in two; he stepped behind this pillar and waited.

Victoria stood at the glass door and greeted her mother.

“You're back so early. How much I missed you, Mama!”

Schach heard all of this. “One sin covered by another,” ran through his mind. “It's the same old story.”

But the sharp point of his words was aimed at himself and not Victoria.

Then he stepped out of his hiding place and walked swiftly and noiselessly down the stairs.

IX.

Schach withdraws

“Until tomorrow then,” had been Schach's words of farewell, but he did not return. Not on the second or third day either. Victoria tried to explain this to herself, but when that wouldn't work, she picked up Lisette's letter and read over and over the passage which she had long since memorized.

“You really cannot go around nurturing your feelings of mistrust for people who deserve just the opposite from you. And Schach would number among these people, I should think. And the more I consider the matter, it seems to me that you are facing a decision: you must give up either your good opinion of Schach or your distrust of him.” Yes, Lisette was right, yet she was still afraid. “If only everything . . .” And she blushed all over.

Finally on the fourth day he came. But it so happened that she had gone into town shortly before. When she returned home, she heard about his visit. He had been very nice, had asked about her two or three times and had left a bouquet for her. It was violets and roses, which filled the room with their fragrance. Victoria made an effort, while her mother went on about the visit, to put on a bold face, but her heart was too full of contradictory feelings, and she retreated to have a good cry prompted by both happiness and anxiety.

Meanwhile the day had come when “The Consecration of Strength” was to be performed. Schach sent his servant to inquire whether the ladies were of a mind to attend the performance. It was merely a formality, for he knew that they were so minded.

Every seat in the theater was taken. Schach sat across from the Carayons and waved at them politely. But it went no further than that, and he did not come over to their loge. Frau von Carayon was hardly less hurt by his restraint than Victoria. But in the meanwhile the play had divided the audience into two camps, and the battle between them had become so vigorous and exciting that both ladies were drawn into the fray, and, for a moment at least, forgot all personal affairs. Only on the way home did their amazement at Schach's behavior return.

The next morning he stopped by. Frau von Carayon was overjoyed, but Victoria, who saw things more clearly, felt quite ill at ease. It was quite evident that he had waited until today so that he would have a convenient subject for conversation, thereby escaping more easily from the awkwardness of the first reunion with Victoria. He kissed Frau von Carayon's hand, then turned to Victoria to express his regrets at having missed her on his last visit. They were hardly getting to know one another any better, he said. And he said it in such a way that she wondered whether it had been said with sincerity or merely from embarrassment. She thought about it, but before she could make up her mind, the conversation turned to the play.

“What did you think of it?” Frau von Carayon asked.

“I don't like comedies that go on for five hours,” Schach answered. “I look for amusement or recreation at the theater; I don't look for a physical challenge.”

“Agreed. But that's a superficial matter and a fault which will very soon be corrected, by the way. Iffland himself has consented to significant cuts. But I want to know your opinion, Schach.”

“I was not satisfied with it.”

“And why not?”

“Because it gets everything confused. There never **was** a Luther like that, thank God, and if one were ever to come along, he would lead us right back to where we were when the real Luther was alive. Every line of the play runs counter to the spirit of the Reformation period. It's all Jesuitical or mystical and plays fast and loose—almost childishly—with truth and history. None of it was right. I was constantly reminded of that picture by Albrecht Dürer which depicts Pontius Pilate on horseback with pistol holsters, or of that equally famous altar-painting in Soest which shows a Westphalian ham on a platter instead of the Paschal lamb. But in this *soi-disant* [self-styled] play about Luther we see the most papistical of priests on the platter. It's anachronistic from beginning to end.”

“Fine. So much for Luther. But, I repeat, what about the **play**?”

“Luther **is** the play. The rest is insignificant. Or do you expect me to wax enthusiastic over

Katharina von Bora,⁷¹ for a nun, who, when you get down to it, wasn't a nun at all?"

Victoria lowered her gaze and her hand trembled. Schach noticed this and was horrified at his *faux pas*,⁷² spoke hastily and precipitously about a parody that someone was doing, about a protest announced by the Lutheran clergy, about the Court, about Iffland, about the playwright himself, and finally concluded with exaggerated praise for the vocal and instrumental sections. He hoped, he said, that Fräulein Victoria had not forgotten that evening on which he had had the privilege of accompanying her at the piano.

All of this was spoken in a friendly tone, but it sounded as distant as it did friendly, and Victoria with her understanding ear perceived that it was not the tone she had a right to expect. She tried to answer him nonchalantly, but the rest of his visit never progressed beyond polite conversation.

The day after this visit Aunt Marguerite appeared. At court she had heard about the lovely play "which was one of the loveliest ever written," and so she wanted to see it. Frau von Carayon was willing to accommodate her and took her to the second performance; and since it was shortened quite a bit, there was still time to chat for half an hour when they returned home.

"Well, Aunt Marguerite," Victoria asked, "how did you like it?"

"Fine, my dear. Because it touched upon the primary issue of our reformed choich."

"Which one do you mean, Auntie?"

"Why, Christian matrimony, of course."

Victoria forced herself to keep a straight face and then said, "I thought that the central matter in our church might be something else, such as the doctrine of the Lord's Supper."

"Oh, no, my dear Victoria. Of **that** I am quite sure. Whether you use wine or not doesn't make a great deal of difference. But whether our *prédicateurs* [preachers] live within the proper bonds of marriage, **that**, my little angel, is soitably a matter *d'importance*."

"And it seems to me that Aunt Marguerite is quite right," Frau von Carayon said.

"And **that**," continued Aunt Marguerite, surprised by the unexpected support, "is what the play is trying to show, that's obvious because Mrs. Bethmann⁷³ is soitably a very pretty woman. Or at least much prettier than she actually was. I mean the nun. But that doesn't matter, because he wasn't a handsome man either, not even as handsome as **him** [Schach]. Go right ahead and blush, Victoria, but I know how things stand."

Frau von Carayon laughed heartily.

"And it's true, our Captain von Schach is soitably a **very** charming fellow, and my head is still toining from that day at Tempelhof with that knight buried standing upright . . . And you know that they say there's another one in Wilmersdorf? And he's just as worn down. And who do you think told me that? Can you guess? I have it from *la petite princesse Charlotte*."

X.

"Something has to happen."

"The Consecration of Strength" continued to be performed, and Berlin continued to be divided

71 Katharina von Bora, formerly a nun, married Martin Luther.

72 Evidently Schach's *faux pas* [social error] was his oblique reference to Katharina von Bora's loss of her virginity when she married Luther, mirroring Victoria's recent sexual encounter with Schach.

73 Mrs. Bethmann (1766-1814), one of the greatest German actresses, using the name of her second husband.

into two camps. All mystical-Romantic souls were **for** it, all the liberals against it. This feud persisted even within the Carayon household; while Mama waxed enthusiastic partly for the sake of the court and partly from her own “feelings,” Victoria felt herself repulsed by its overly sentimental elements. She thought it was all untrue and inauthentic, and reassured everyone that Schach had been correct in everything he had said.

Schach did visit now from time to time, but only he could be certain of finding Victoria in the company of her mother. He now frequented the “great houses” again, and, as Nostitz mockingly said, he added to the Radziwills' and Carolaths' account what he subtracted from the Carayons'.

Alvensleben, too, made jokes about it, and even Victoria tried to strike the same tone. But without success. She sat and daydreamed, but she was not actually sad. Nor was she unhappy.

Among those who were preoccupied with the play, which is to say, the topic of the day, were the officers of the Regiment Gensdarmes, although it did not occur to them to take a serious position **for** or **against** it. They saw everything exclusively from the comic side, and discovered in the dissolution of a convent, in Katharina von Bora's “nine-year-old stepchild,” and in a Luther who constantly played the flute, inexhaustible material for mockery and cockiness.

Their favorite gathering place in those days was the regimental guard-room, where the younger comrades were accustomed to visit the officers on duty and to amuse themselves until late at night. In the conversations held here concerning the new comedy, mockery such as that mentioned above was regularly on the agenda; and when one of the comrades reminded them that the Regiment Gensdarmes, so recently fallen from its earlier high position, had a kind of patriotic duty to show itself again “as a unit,” then a huge cheer broke out, at the end of which it was unanimously decided that “something has to happen.” That it could be nothing other than a travesty of “The Consecration of Strength,” perhaps done as a masquerade, was a foregone conclusion, and there were differing opinions only as to how this should be carried out. As a result they agreed to meet **again** in a few days, at which time one proposal would be selected from the several possibilities presented.

Word spread quickly, and when the hour of the meeting finally arrived, some twenty comrades had gathered in the previously-mentioned locale. Itzenplitz, Jürgaß, and Britzke were there, likewise Billerbeck and Diricke, Count Haeseler, Count Herzberg, von Rochow, von Putlitz, one of the Krachts, a Klitzing, and—last but not least—a Lieutenant von Zieten, an older, short, ugly and bow-legged little fellow, who made up for his faults by some distant relationship with the famous general of that name and perhaps even more by his piercing billy-goat's voice. Nostitz and Alvensleben were there too. Schach was not present.

“Who's going to be the chairman?” Klitzing asked.

“Only two possibilities,” Diricke answered. “The tallest man or the shortest. I mean, Nostitz or Zieten.”

“Nostitz, Nostitz!” everyone clamored at once, and the chairman by acclamation took a seat in a sagging lawn chair. There were bottles and glasses along the long table.

“Make a speech. *Assemblée nationale*.....”

Nostitz let the noise continue for a while, then pounded on the table, using as a gavel the saber which lay beside him as a sign of his dignity.

“*Silentium, silentium*” [Silence, please.]

“Brothers of the Regiment Gensdarmes, heirs of a distinguished reputation on the field of military and social honor (for we not only strike the decisive blow in battle, but we also set the tone for society), brothers, I say, we have made up our minds: **something has to happen!**”

“That's right. Something has to happen.”

“And newly re-invigorated by 'The Consecration of Strength' we have resolved, for the sake of

old Luther and ourselves, to put together a show that will be talked about until the end of time. It has to be something big! Let us remember that the man who is not marching forward is marching backward. It shall be a procession. That much is certain. It remains for us to determine its nature and character, and for that self-same purpose we are gathered here today. I am now ready to consider each of your proposals in turn. Anyone who has a suggestion to make, please stand up.”

Among those who asked for the floor was Lieutenant von Zieten.

“Lieutenant von Zieten has the floor.”

The latter stood up and said, while supporting himself somewhat on the back of his chair, “What I would like to suggest is a sleigh-ride.”

They all looked around, a few people laughed.

“In July?”

“In July,” Zieten repeated. “We’ll have salt put down on Unter den Linden,⁷⁴ that’s what we’ll use for sledding. First a few renegade nuns. Then in the main sled, at the center of the parade will be Luther and his assistant, each with a flute, while old Katie rides in the back seat. Torches and whips can be used *ad libitum*. Advance riders will start the procession. We can borrow costumes from the theater or make our own. That’s all I have to say.”

A noisy tumult was the response which lasted until Nostitz was able to restore order. “I shall take this noise simply as agreement and congratulate Brother Zieten on having hit the bull’s eye on the first and only shot. A sledding party has been suggested. Do you accept?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Then all that’s left to do is to divide up the parts. Who will play Luther?”

“Schach.”

“He won’t do it.”

j “Oh, no, he won’t,” crowed Zieten, who harbored a special ill-will against the handsome Schach, who more than once had been chosen for something over Zieten. “How could you get such a wrong idea about Schach! I know him better than that. True, he will complain for thirty minutes about having to make himself up with high cheekbones and change his normal oval head to a peasant-like *tête carrée* [thick skull]. Finally one kind of vanity will triumph and he will find sufficient reward in being the man of the hour for a whole day.”

Before Zieten had finished speaking, a lance corporal entered from the guard-house to deliver a message addressed to Nostitz.

“Ah, *lupus in fabula*.”⁷⁵

“From Schach?”

“It is!”

“Read it, read it!”

And Nostitz opened the letter and read. “I beg you, dear Nostitz, to play my mediator and, if necessary, my advocate at the meeting of our young officers presumably taking place this very moment. I received the notice and was originally disposed to attend. In the meantime, however, I have been told what the meeting would probably be about, and this communication has altered my decision. It is certainly no secret to you that all those plans go against my grain, and you can easily figure out how little I would care for a masquerade-party Luther—I, for whom Luther on stage is *contre coeur*.⁷⁶ The timing of the masquerade prohibits our using the mardi gras atmosphere as an excuse, and that certainly does nothing to improve the situation. No pressure should be placed on the younger officers because of my own position on this matter, however, and, in any case, you may be sure of my discretion. I am not

74 A major boulevard in Berlin.

75 Latin, “the wolf in the story.” Used when someone enters unexpectedly, cf. “Speak of the devil.”

76 French. Literally “against the heart”, hence unnatural, against one’s inmost feelings.

the conscience of the Regiment, and even less its keeper. Yours, Schach.”

“I knew it,” said Nostitz calmly as he burned Schach's missive in the flame of the light nearest him. “Our comrade Zieten is better at suggestions and phantasy than in his understanding of people. He wants to respond to that, I see, but I cannot yield the floor because the only question we can consider now is who is going to play Luther? I shall put the reformer up for auction. The highest bidder gets him. Going once, going twice, going....going. No bidders? Then there's nothing left to do but appoint someone. Alvensleben, you're elected.”

Alvensleben shook his head. “I feel the same way about it as Schach. Go ahead with the game, I'm no spoil-sport, but personally I don't want to take part. Cannot and will not. Luther's catechism has become too much a part of me.”

Nostitz didn't want to give up immediately. “Everything in its own good time,” he began, “and if seriousness has its day, then humor may have its hour at least. You're being much too conscientious, too solemn, too pedantic. Just like Schach. Nothing in the world is inherently good or evil. And remember that we aren't going to make fun of good old Luther, just the opposite, we want to avenge him. The thing to be made fun of is the **play**, its caricature of Luther, its distortion and misrepresentation of the reformer. This is a court of judgment on matters of highest public morality. Take the part. You can't leave us in the lurch, or we'll all go down together.”

Other people expressed similar thoughts. But Alvensleben remained firm, and a certain ill-humor disappeared only when young Count Herzberg unexpectedly stood up (and therefore was greeted with general applause) and volunteered for the role.

Everything that had yet to be done was quickly accomplished, and before ten minutes had passed, the leading roles had been assigned. Count Herzberg was to play Luther, Diricke, his assistant; Nostitz, because of his great height, was to play Katharina von Bora. The rest were simply conscripted to be nuns, and only Zieten, to whom special thanks were due, advanced to the rank of abbess. Whereupon Zieten announced that from his sled he would begin a game, or play a round of *mariage*⁷⁷ with the steward of the convent. A new cheer arose, and after the date for the masquerade had been somewhat hastily set for the following Monday, and the group strictly forbidden to breathe a word about their plans, Nostitz concluded the meeting.

At the doorway Diricke turned around once again and asked, “And what if it rains?”

“Rain will not be permitted.”

“And what will happen to the salt?”

“*C'est pour les domestiques.*”⁷⁸

“*Et pour la canaille,*”⁷⁹ the youngest standard-bearer said, putting an end to it all.

XI.

The Sleigh Ride

Silence had been requested, and actually no one disclosed a thing. A case perhaps unique in history. There probably was talk in town that the Gensdarmes “were up to something,” and that they

⁷⁷ A card game the name of which (“marriage”) pokes fun at Luther's marriage to Katharina von Bora.

⁷⁸ French. The servants will take care of it.

⁷⁹ French. And the common folk.

were cooking up one of those audacious pranks which gave them a reputation better than that of the other regiments. But no one found out either the subject of their craziness or the day for which it was planned. Even the Carayon ladies, at whose last soirée [evening party] both Schach and Alvensleben had been absent, had been deprived of any communication, and so the famous “summer sleigh ride” came as a complete surprise to friend and stranger alike.

They gathered at dusk in a stable near Dorotheenstrasse and Mittelstrasse. With a dozen splendidly dressed advance riders accompanied by torch bearers, exactly as Zieten had proposed, at the stroke of nine they dashed past the academy building heading towards Unter den Linden, turned, then coursed down Wilhlemstrasse, turning onto Behrenstrasse and finally Charlottenstrasse; then they repeated with ever-increasing speed the “Linden quadrangle” route just described.

The **first** time the procession passed by the Carayon house and the torch light shone glaringly through all the panes of the windows on the ground floor, Frau von Carayon, who happened to be alone, hurried to the window in panic and looked out onto the street. But instead of hearing calls of “Fire!” as she had expected, she only heard the crack of whips mixed with the ringing of sleigh bells, as if it were mid-winter, and before she had calmed down again, it was already gone, leaving her confused, questioning, and half-stunned. Such was the condition in which Victoria found her.

“For heaven's sake, Mama, what's wrong?”

But before Frau von Carayon could answer, the front end of the parade was going by for the **second** time, and mother and daughter, who had hurriedly stepped out of the corner room onto the balcony in order to have a better view, no longer had the slightest doubt from that moment on about the meaning of the whole scene. It was mockery, no matter of whom or what. First there were the dissolute nuns, led by a witch of an abbess, howling, drinking, and playing cards. In the middle of the procession there was a sled moving on rollers, and to judge from the richness of its gilt-work, the main sleigh was evidently intended as a triumphal chariot complete with Luther, his assistant, and Katharina von Bora on the back board. They recognized Nostitz's imposing figure. But who was the one on the front seat, Victoria asked herself. Who was hiding behind that mask of Luther? Was it **he**? No, that was impossible. And yet, even if it was **not** he, he was nonetheless an accomplice in this repulsive show, which he had condoned or at least not prevented. What a degenerate world, how impious, how lacking in propriety! How shallow and sickening. A feeling of boundless misery seized her on seeing beautiful things distorted and purity dragged through the mud. And why? Out of petty vanity, so that people would talk about them for a day. And that was the company in which she had lived, moved and had her being, in which she had looked for love, and oh, worst of all, had believed in love!

“Let's go,” she said, taking her mother's arm, and turned around to go back inside. But before she got inside she was overcome by a fainting spell and collapsed on the threshold.

Mama pulled the bell-cord, Beate came, and the two of them carried her to the sofa, where she was immediately seized by strong chest cramps. She sobbed, sat up, then sank back into the pillows, and when her mother was about to bathe her forehead and temples with cologne, Victoria pushed her away. But the very next second she grabbed the bottle from her mother's hands and poured it over her throat and neck. “I hate myself as much as I hate the world. When I was sick that time I prayed to God to let me live But we **ought** not to ask for life God knows best and what is good for us. And if He wants to take us to Himself, then we ought not to ask Him to leave us alone.... Oh, how sharply I feel that. I was allowed to live but just look at me!”

Frau von Carayon knelt down next to the sofa and spoke to her. At the same instant, however, the sledding party shot past the house for a **third** time, and once more it seemed as if black, phantasmagoric figures stalked and snared their prey in the red-hot light. “Isn't it just like hell?” Victoria said as she pointed to the play of shadows on the ceiling.

Frau von Carayon sent Beate to fetch a doctor. In truth, however, she was more intent on

having a chance to speak to her beloved child in private than in having a doctor come.

“What's wrong with you? You're all atremble. You look so dazed. I don't recognize my cheerful Victoria any more. Think, my child, of what just happened. One more silly prank, one among many, and I can remember the time when you would have laughed at their daring rather than complained about it. There's something else that's tormenting you and weighing on your mind. I've known it for days. But you haven't told me, you're keeping a secret from me. I beg you, Victoria, tell me. You know you may. No matter what it is.”

Victoria threw her arms around Frau von Carayon's neck, and a flood of tears streamed down her face.

“Oh, you're the best mother anyone ever had!”

And she drew her closer to herself, kissed her, and confessed everything.

XII.

Schach visits Frau von Carayon

The next morning Frau von Carayon sat beside her daughter's bed and said, as her daughter looked up at her with a newly-regained expression of peace and happiness, “Don't give up hope, my child. I have known him for so long. Like all handsome men he is weak and vain, but his sense of justice is above average and his character noble.”

At that moment Captain von Schach was announced, and old Jannasch added “that he had shown him to the salon.”

Frau von Carayon nodded approvingly.

“I knew he would come,” Victoria said.

“Because you dreamed it?”

“No, I didn't dream it. I only observe and calculate. For some time now I've known in advance on what day and for what occasion he will visit. He always comes when something has happened or there is some bit of news that he can talk about easily. He avoids an intimate conversation with me. That's why he came after the performance of the play, and now he's coming after the performance of the sleigh ride. But I do wonder whether he took part in it. If he did, then tell him how much it hurt me. On second thought, perhaps I won't say anything.”

Frau von Carayon was moved. “Oh, my dear sweet Victoria, you're too good, much too good. He doesn't deserve it, no one does.” And she caressed her daughter, then and crossed the hall to the salon where Schach was waiting for her.

The captain seemed less constrained than usual and bowed to kiss her hand, which she obligingly allowed him to do. And yet her behavior was changed. With a ceremoniousness which was not her wont, she directed him to one of the Japanese chairs standing to one side, and pulling up a cushion for her feet, she took a seat on the sofa.

“I've come to ask how the ladies are doing, and also to ask whether the masquerade yesterday found favor in your eyes.”

“To speak plainly, it did not. I, for my part, found it quite unseemly, and Victoria was almost repulsed by it.”

“A feeling which I share.”

“Then you weren't part of it?”

“Definitely not. And I'm surprised that I have to reassure you of it. You know very well my

position on this question, my dear Josephine. You have known it since that evening when we first discussed the play and its author. What I said then holds true today. Serious matters demand a serious treatment, and I'm frankly happy to find Victoria on my side. Is she at home?"

"In bed."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"Yes and no, the after-effect of chest cramps⁸⁰ and a crying spell she had yesterday evening."

"Probably the result of that sleigh ride nonsense. I sincerely regret it."

"And yet," said Frau von Carayon, "I owe a debt of gratitude to just that very nonsense. Her disgust at the mummery she was forced to witness had the effect of loosening her tongue. She ended her long silence and confided a secret to me, a secret which you know."

Schach, who felt doubly guilty, turned bright red.

"Schach, dear," Frau von Carayon continued as she took his hand and looked at him pleasantly but firmly with her intelligent eyes, "dear Schach, I'm not silly enough to create a scene or preach a sermon. Among the things I most hate is empty talk about moral values. I have been aware of the ways of the world since childhood; I know this world and have learned much from personal experience. And even if I were hypocritical enough to want to conceal it from myself and from others, how could I conceal it from **you**?"

She fell silent for a moment as she touched her forehead with her linen handkerchief. Then she began again and added: "To be sure there are some people, and now even some women, who stretch the meaning of 'not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing' to mean that we should not know today what we did yesterday. Even less the day before yesterday. But I am not one of those virtuosos of forgetting. I never deny anything; I don't want to, and I can't. So now condemn me, if you can."

He was visibly struck by her words, and his posture showed just how much power she still had over him.

"Dear Schach," she continued, "you see, I await your verdict. But even if unconditionally I refrain from any kind of defense or advocacy of Josephine von Carayon, for **Josephine** (pardon me, but your yourself conjured up the old name), I still cannot refrain from playing the advocate for **Frau** von Carayon, for her house and her name."

Schach seemed to want to interrupt, but she would not allow it: "Just a minute. I will soon be finished with what I have to say. Victoria begged me to say **nothing**, to reveal nothing, not even to **you**, and to demand nothing. As punishment for half the guilt (and I'm being generous when I speak of **half** the guilt), she wants to bear the **whole** burden before the eyes of the world. In her own peculiar Romantic way she wants to turn bad fortune to good. She exults in seeing herself as a victim, sacrificing herself happily for the **one** she loves and that which she **will** love. But as weak as I am in my love for Victoria, I'm still not weak enough to support her in the melodramatic generosity. I belong to society and I fulfill its dictates and submit myself to its laws. That's how I was reared, and I have no intention of giving up my social standing because of my dear and only daughter's whimsical notions of sacrifice. In other words, I have no desire to enter a convent or to play the stylite who renounces the world, not even for Victoria's sake. Therefore, I must press for a legitimization of what has happened. That, my dear captain, is all that I had to say to you."

Schach, who in the meanwhile had found a few moments to gather his wits, replied that he well knew that everything in life had its natural consequences and that he had no intention of denying his responsibilities. If what he **now** knew had been made known to him earlier, then he would certainly have voluntarily taken just those steps which Frau von Carayon was now demanding. It had been his

80 Chest cramps were associated with the early stages of pregnancy. This is a hint to the reader about Victoria's condition.

wish to remain unmarried, and to bid farewell to an idea cherished for so long produced a certain temporary confusion. But with no less certainty he felt that he would be able to congratulate himself for the good fortune which this change would soon bring into his life. Victoria was her mother's daughter, that was the best guarantee for his future and the promise of genuine happiness.

All of this was spoken deftly and engagingly but at the same time with a remarkable coolness.

Frau von Carayon was not just hurt by his tone but actually offended. What she had heard was the language neither of love nor of guilt, and when Schach had finished, she replied pointedly: "I am very grateful for those words, Herr von Schach, especially for those that concern me personally. In your own heart you must know, though, that your 'yes' could have sounded less reserved and less contrived. But no matter, a 'yes' is enough for me. After all, what do I really want? A service in the cathedral and a festive wedding. I want to see myself once again in the yellow satin that suits me so well, and once we have danced with *flambeaux* [candles] and have cut Victoria's garter⁸¹—for after all, we will carry on somewhat *à la princesse* [as befits a princess], if only for Aunt Marguerite's sake—then I'll give you *carte blanche*, you'll be free again, free as a bird in the air, free to do or not to do, to hate or to love, and that which **had** to be done will have been done."

Schach remained silent.

"For the present I shall be content with an engagement without a formal announcement. We'll have no trouble reaching an agreement about everything else. There can be a written agreement, if necessary. But now my patient is waiting, and so if you will excuse me...."

Frau von Carayon stood up and immediately thereafter Schach took his leave very formally. No further word was exchanged between them.

XIII.

"*Le choix du Schach*" [Schach's Choice]

They had parted in a state of almost overt animosity. But everything went better than could have been expected after this tense conversation, mostly thanks to a letter that Schach wrote to Frau von Carayon the next day. In the letter he frankly acknowledged his guilt, but attributed it, as he had done during the conversation itself, to surprise and confusion; and in making these explanations he struck a warmer tone, a more cordial style. Indeed, his sense of justice, which he wanted to satisfy, had prompted him to say more than perhaps was good and wise. He spoke of his love for Victoria and avoided, purposefully or accidentally, all those assurances of respect and esteem that hurt so much when what is required is a simple confession of genuine inclination. Victoria hung on every word, and when Mama finally put the letter down, she observed, not without emotion, how two minutes of happiness had been sufficient to restore her daughter's hope and **with** it also her lost vitality. The patient beamed, felt healed, and Frau von Carayon said, "How pretty you are, Victoria."

That selfsame day Schach received a letter in reply which expressed in uncomplicated fashion the heartfelt joy of his old friend, Frau von Carayon. The bitter things she had said, she hoped he would forget; she had, being a vivacious person, just gotten carried away. Otherwise, neither serious

81 Cutting the bride's garter was a feature of traditional German weddings.

problems nor obstacles had remained undiscussed, and if the proverb were true that sorrow grows out of joy, then the reverse could also happen. Her vision of the future was positive again and she could hope again. Her personal sacrifice she performed gladly, if that sacrifice were the condition for her daughter's happiness.

When he had read the letter Schach was torn in his reaction to it and had evident mixed emotions about it. When he had spoken of Victoria in his letter he had given himself over to one of those friendly-cordial moods, which he could have denied neither her or anyone else, and had even (now he remembered) expressed these feelings especially vividly. But it was not much **more** that Josephine's letter called to mind: it clearly meant a wedding, marriage—words the mere sound of which had always frightened him. Marriage! And marriage to **whom**? To a beauty who, as the Prince had been pleased to express it, “had come through the fires of purgatory.” “But,” as he continued the dialogue with himself, “I do not share the Prince's perspective. I don't go into ecstasy over 'processes of purification' regarding which it cannot even be ascertained whether the loss is not greater than the gain. And even if I could be personally converted to that standpoint, I still couldn't convert the whole world I would be the helpless victim of the scorn of my joking colleagues. What I have to look forward to is to become a perfect example of the ridiculousness of one of those 'country marriages,' blooming like a violet in the shade. I see exactly how it will turn out: I'll resign my commission and return to Wuthenow; there I'll cultivate the fields, enrich the land, grow rape or turnips, and strive for the highest degree of marital fidelity. What a life, what a future! **One** Sunday a sermon, the **next** a gospel or an epistle reading, in between whist *en trois*,⁸² and always with the same pastor. And then a prince happens to come to the next town, perhaps Prince Louis himself, and changes his horses while I come to attend him at the city gate or at the inn. And he'll look up and down, notice my old-fashioned coat, and will ask me how I'm doing. And at the same time every expression on his face will say, 'Oh, God! What three years can do to a person.' Three years And three can turn into thirty.”

He had been walking up and down in his room and stopped in front of a mirror console where he had put the letter while speaking. Two, three times he picked it up and put it down again. “My fate. Yes, 'immediate circumstances always determine things.' I remember now, that's how she put it then. Did she know what would happen? Did she **want** it to come to this? Oh, for shame, Schach, don't malign the sweet girl! It's all **your** fault. Your **guilt** is your fate. And I will bear it.”

He rang, gave the servant a few instructions, and left to see the Carayons.

It seemed as if the internal dialogue with himself had freed him from the pressure that weighed upon him. His conversation with his old friend Frau von Carayon was now natural, almost cordial, and the two discussed the course of action without even the smallest cloud threatening Frau von Carayon's newly-restored confidence. Schach proved to be in agreement with everything: in a week, the engagement; then after three weeks, the wedding. Immediately after the wedding the young couple was to begin a trip to Italy and was not to return home until a year had passed. Schach would return to the capital, Victoria to Wuthenow, the old family property, which she fondly remembered from an earlier visit (when Schach's mother was still alive). And even if the estate had been leased out, the manor house was still there at their disposal, and they could move in at any time.

After making arrangements such as these, they parted. A ray of sunshine fell over the House of Carayon, and Victoria forgot all the distress which had gone before.

Schach, too, pulled himself together. Since his first stay in Italy only a few years before, it had been his burning desire to see Italy again, and now this wish was to be fulfilled. And when they did return, there were all sorts of advantages to be had from the plan for maintaining two households.

82 Whist, a card game, to be played by three persons—*en trois*.

Victoria looked forward to a quiet life in the country. From time to time he would take some time off and ride or drive over. And then they would walk through the fields and talk. Oh, she was a good conversationalist, unpretentious and witty. And when another year, or two or three had passed, whatever the case, the thing would have run its course, would be dead and forgotten. The world forgets so quickly, and society even sooner. Then they would get to come back to the house at the corner of the Wilhelmsplatz and both would be happy to return to circumstances which would feel more like home to both of them. All dangers would have been avoided and the ship of life, poised at the edge of ridiculousness, would not have run aground.

Poor Schach! The heavens had a different plan in mind.

The week before the engagement was to be announced had not passed before a letter with a full address and large red seal was sent to his home. At first he thought it was an official document (perhaps an appointment to some office), and hesitated before opening it so as to prolong the pleasure of anticipation. But where did it come from? From whom did it come? He examined the seal curiously and quickly discovered that it was not an official seal at all, but rather the impression of a cameo. Strange. He proceeded to break open the letter and a picture fell out, a pencil sketch with the caption, *La choix du Schach* [Schach's choice]. He repeated the words to himself without being able to understand them as they related to himself or to the picture; but he did have a general and indefinite sense of attack and danger. And actually, after he was a bit more oriented, he saw that his first thought had been right. Underneath a canopy sat the Persian shah,⁸³ recognizable by his tall lamb-skin cap, while on the lowest step up to the throne two female figures stood and waited for the moment when the figure above, staring coldly and nobly down at them, would make his choice between them. And the Persian shah was simply **our Schach**, drawn with the most striking accuracy. The two figures who looked up at him questioningly could easily be recognized as Frau von Carayon and Victoria, although the heads of the women were sketched with much less precision. In short, it was nothing more or less than a caricature. His relationship to the Carayons was being talked about in town, and one of his enemies, or someone envious of him—of such he had only too many—had seized the opportunity to satisfy spiteful desires.

Schach trembled from shame and anger, his blood rose to his head, and he felt as if he had been dealt a hard blow.

Following an understandable need for air and physical activity, or perhaps filled with a presentiment that the last arrow might not yet have been loosed, he took his hat and sword to go for a walk. A chance meeting and some conversation might provide some diversion and restore his equanimity. What could this be, after all, but a petty act of revenge?

The fresh air did him good; he breathed freer; turning off Wilhelmsplatz to Unter den Linden, he had almost regained his good mood by the time he crossed to the shadier side of the street to speak to a few acquaintances who were coming that way. But they avoided talking to him and were visibly embarrassed. Zieten came too, greeted Schach casually and, if appearances did not deceive, with a slight smirk. Schach stared after him, pondered and considered what Zieten's smugness and the embarrassed faces of the other group might mean. A hundred steps further on he became aware of an unusually large group of people standing in front of a small picture shop. A few were laughing, others were chattering, but all of them seemed to be asking "Well, what is it?" Schach walked around behind the crowd of onlookers, cast a glance over their heads, and saw all he needed to. An identical caricature hung in the middle window and the price—purposely set low—was written beneath it in large red print.

So, it was a conspiracy then.

83 Shah is *Schach* in German, a visual pun on his name.

Schach no longer had the strength to continue his walk, so he returned to his apartment. Around noon Sander received a letter from Bülow:

“Dear Sander, I have just received a caricature of Schach and the Carayon ladies. Uncertain as to whether you've seen it yet, I enclose it with these lines. Please try to trace its origin. You're up on everything and even hear the grass grow here in Berlin. I, for my part, am outraged. **Not** for Schach's sake; to a certain degree he deserved this 'Shah of Persia' (after all, he's really something like that). But for the Carayons. Poor dear Victoria! To be exposed like that. We copy all the bad things from the French, and their good qualities, among them, of course, *gentilezza*,⁸⁴ we overlook. Yours, B.”

Sander cast only a fleeting glance at the picture, which he had already seen, and then sat down at his desk to reply:

“*Mon général!* I have no need to trace the origin for it sought **me** out. About four or five days ago a gentleman appeared in my office and asked if I would undertake to distribute some drawings. When I saw what the whole thing was about, I refused. There were three sheets, among them '*Le choix du Schach.*' This person pretended to be a foreigner, but despite his artificial mangling of the language, he spoke German so well that I had to consider his strangeness just a disguise. Certain persons from Prince R's circle have been offended by his little affair with the princess and they are probably behind all this. But if I err in this assumption, one may still reckon with some certainty that it can be traced to members of his regiment. He is by no means popular; anyone who plays aloof never is. The story might easily have been ignored, if only, as you very correctly point out, the Carayons had not been drawn into it. For **their** sake, I lament this prank, and the maliciousness behind it will hardly have been exhausted in this **one** picture. The two others which I mentioned earlier will probably follow in due course. Everything about this anonymous attack is cleverly calculated—as is the idea of not setting out all the poison at once. It will certainly achieve the desired effect, we just have to wait and see **how**. *Tout à vous* [devotedly yours], S[ander].”

And indeed, the concern which Sander had expressed to Bülow in these lines was to prove itself only too justified. As intermittently as a fever the two other drawings appeared in intervals of two days, and, like the first one, were bought or at least gaped at and talked about by everyone who passed by. The Schach-Carayon matter became a *cause célèbre* [well-known incident] overnight, even though the curious crowds knew only half the story. Schach, it was said, had now rejected the beautiful mother in favor of the not-so-beautiful daughter. And there was much speculation on this theme without anyone's finding the right answer.

Schach also received the other two sheets in an envelope. The seal was the same. The second sheet was entitled “*La gazza ladra*” or “Schach, the thieving magpie” and showed a magpie examining two rings of unequal value and finally taking the more improbable one out of a jewelry tray.

But the most hurtful one was the third sheet, which used Frau von Carayon's salon as its setting. On a table stood a chess⁸⁵ board; the pieces were all scattered about as if to indicate a lost match. Next to it sat Victoria, accurately depicted in the drawing, with Schach kneeling at her feet wearing the Persian hat from the first drawing, but this time with a peak on it and pressed down. Beneath it, the caption: “Checkmate!”

The object of these repeated attacks was only too easily achieved. Schach sent word that he was sick, saw no one, and asked for a furlough, which was granted by his superior officer, Colonel von

⁸⁴ Italian for “good manners” or being well-brought-up.

⁸⁵ Chess in German is *Schach*.

Schwerin, without the slightest hesitation.

And so it happened that he quitted Berlin on the same day on which, by mutual agreement, his engagement with Victoria was to be announced. He went to his country estate without taking leave of the Carayons (whose doorstep he had not once darkened in all this time).

XIV.

At Wuthenow on the Lake

The clock struck twelve midnight as Schach arrived at Wuthenow. At the opposite end of the town stood Wuthenow Manor, built on a hill with a view on both sides of Lake Ruppín.⁸⁶ In the houses and cottages everyone had long since been fast asleep, and the only noises were the occasional stomping of a horse's feet or the lowing of a cow in the stalls.

Schach passed through the village and near the end of it he turned onto a narrow country lane which rose gradually to the manor house on the hill. On the right stood the trees of the surrounding park, on the left a new-mown field that filled the air with the smell of hay. The manor itself was nothing but an old, white-washed half-timbered structure with tarred rafting; its extreme and sober ordinariness had been overcome only when Schach's mother, the recently deceased lady of the house had added a double roof, a lightning rod, and a magnificent terrace constructed to look like Sanssouci.⁸⁷ Now, to be sure, in the starlight, there it stood like a fairytale castle, and Schach stopped now and again and looked up, evidently struck by the beauty of the scene.

Finally he reached the top and rode towards the entrance gate, which formed a low-slung arch between the gables of the manor and the servants' quarters next to it. At that moment he heard a dog barking and growling, then heard the animal charge out of his house in a fury, dragging its chain along the wooden wall.

"Lie down, Hector." And the animal, recognizing its master's voice, began to howl and whine for joy, jumping on and off the doghouse.

In front of the servants' quarters stood a walnut tree with low branches. Schach dismounted, tied the reins to a branch and knocked quietly on one of the shutters. But he had to knock twice before there were signs of life within, and he heard a drowsy voice from the recess of the room: "What is it?"⁸⁸

"It's me, Krist.

"Good heavens, woman, it's the young master come back."

"It's him all right. Get up now and be quick about it."

Schach heard every word and called good-naturedly into the room, half opening the shutter which was not latched, "Take your time, old man."

⁸⁶ Lake Ruppín, the Ruppiner See, is a large body of water northwest of Berlin. Fontane himself was from the town of Neuruppín, located on Lake Ruppín.

⁸⁷ Sanssouci, summer palace of Frederick the Great.

⁸⁸ The old servant Krist and his wife have thick regional accents. No attempt has been made to replicate their regional accents in English.

But the old man was already out of bed and kept saying as he was collecting himself, "Right away, sir, right away. Just a second now."

And really it was not long before Schach saw the glow of a sulphur wick burning and heard the door of a lantern click open and shut. Sure enough, the first ray of light now beamed through the panes, and a pair of wooden clogs clomped over the clay floor. The bolt was pushed back, and Krist, who in his hurry had put on only a pair of linen trousers, stood in front of his young master. It had been many a day and year since Schach's father had died, and Krist had wanted to transfer the title "my Lord" to Schach, but the latter, who had shot his first coot with Krist and made his first boat trip across the lake with him, would not hear of it.

"Heavens, sir, you usually write first, or send a messenger, or that little English fellow. And this time nothing. But I knew somethin' was up when the frogs' croakin' didn't sound quite right this evenin'. 'Ma,' I said, 'there's somethin' to this.' But you know how women are. What did she say? 'It just means it's goin' to rain,' she said. 'And that's good. Our potatoes need it.'"

"Yes, yes," said Schach, who had only half-listened while the old man opened the little door which led inside from the gabled side of the house. "Yes, yes, rain is good. Now just lead the way."

Krist did as he was told and they both walked along a narrow corridor paved with tile. Only toward the middle did the hallway expand and give way to a generous stairway on the left, while on the right there was a Rococo double-door with ornate gilt cornices that led to a garden salon that had served as the sitting room and reception hall for the late wife of General von Schach, a very formal and very proud old lady. It was there that their footsteps led, and after Krist had opened the warped doors with considerable effort, they entered the garden salon.

Among the many artifacts and souvenirs in the room was a bronze candelabra which Schach himself (three years earlier) had brought back from Italy as a present for his mother and which she greatly admired. Krist now took it from the fireplace and lighted both wax candles, which had long been in their holders and had served the late lady of the house for sealing letters. She herself had been dead for only a year, and because Schach had not been there since that time, everything was just as it had been before. A couple of small sofas still faced each other in the narrow part of the room, while two larger sofas occupied spaces along the longest wall and were separated only by the gilded rococo double doors. The round rosewood table (which had been the lady's pride and joy) and a large marble bowl containing grapes, oranges, and a pineapple all made of alabaster still stood in its place. The whole room was filled, however, with a choking closeness since it had not been aired out for a long time.

"Open a window," Schach said. "And then give me a coverlet. That one over there."

"Are you going to lie down **here**, sir?"

"I've slept in worse places, Krist."

"I know. I sure do remember how your father used to tell us about it. Splash, right in the limey mud! No, no, I couldn't take that myself. 'Heavens, my Lord,' I always used to say. 'That stuff will take your skin off.' But then the old master would laugh and say, 'No, Krist, **our** skin sits tight.'"

While the old man was remembering the past, he grabbed a wide reed carpet beater from the corner of the hearth and tried to get most of the dust off the sofa that Schach had chosen as his bed. But the cloud of dust that arose only proved the vanity of the endeavor, and Schach said with a trace of humor, "Let the dust rest in peace." Not until he had said it did the double meaning occur to him and he thought of his parents in the family crypt down in the village church in their large copper coffins surmounted with a crucifix.

But he did not pursue the image any further and threw himself down on the sofa. "Give my horse a piece of bread and a bucket of water; that will hold him until morning. Now put the light near the window and let it burn . . . No, not there by the open window, the one next to it. And now, good

night, Krist. And lock the door from the outside so they can't carry me away.”

“But surely they won't”

And soon after that Schach heard the clogs clattering the hallway. Before Krist could reach the gabled door and lock it from the outside, his master's overstimulated brain felt heavy and leaden.

But not for long, to be sure. In spite of all the pressure weighing down on him, he felt clearly that something was buzzing around him, touching and tickling him, and after he had turned over, changed position, and even beat the air mechanically, he finally forced himself back into a wakeful state. And now he saw what it was. Smoke from the two smoldering flames had made the musty air even more stifling and had attracted all sorts of insects in from the garden. It only remained to determine what kind they were and what their character. For an instant he thought of bats, but soon he convinced himself that they were simply giant moths and night butterflies flying around the room by the dozen, crashing into the window panes and vainly looking for the open window.

He gathered up the coverlet and slashed at the air to drive the nuisances out. But the insects, frightened by his action, seemed to double in number, and buzzed around him thicker and more loudly than before. There could be no more thought of sleep, and so he went to the open window and jumped out to wait for morning while walking around.

He looked at his pocket watch. Half past one. The garden proper began right outside the salon and consisted of a sun dial in a round flower bed. Around this central feature were triangular beds of flowers—mignonette, larkspur, lilies, and gillyflowers—bordered by boxwood. One quickly saw that an organizing hand had been missing here for some time, even though Krist included the office of gardener among his many responsibilities. The time since the death of Schach's mother had been too short, on the other hand, for the garden to have gone completely to seed. Everything now had the look of luxuriant growth, and a heavy yet refreshing odor of gillyflowers lay over the flower beds and Schach drank it in in ever fuller draughts.

He walked around the round bed once, ten times, balancing on the dividers, which were only a hand's breadth wide, setting one foot in front of the other. He was trying to test his agility and to pass the time pleasantly. But time did not want to disappear so quickly, and when he looked at his watch again, only a quarter of an hour had passed.

So he quitted the flowers and walked towards one of the covered paths which bordered the large garden-park and ran from the top almost to the foot of the hill upon which the manor sat. In many places the path was slightly overgrown, in other places it was open, and it amused him for a while to measure off in steps the distance between dark spaces and light areas. A few times the path was enlarged by a niche or a rotunda where all kinds of carved sandstone figures of gods and goddesses, which he had passed by many hundreds of times before without taking even the slightest notice of them or considering their significance. But today he stopped and took special pleasure in those that lacked heads because they were the darkest and most mysterious and were the most difficult to identify. Finally he got to the end of the covered walk-way, and turned around and repeated his steps. Then, arriving at the path to the village, he heard the clock strike two. Or did the two bells indicate the half hour? Was it half past two? No, it was only two in the morning.

He ceased his promenade up and down the hill, deciding rather to do a half circle around the foot of the hill until he reached the front of the manor itself. Then he looked up and saw the large terrace, which was lined with boxed orange trees and pyramid-shaped cypresses almost all the way down to the lake. Only a small bit of meadow separated the tree-lined terrace from the lake, and on this field stood an ancient oak, the shadow of which Schach now walked around once, then many times as though he were under its spell. It was evident that the circle he was describing reminded him of another circle, for he muttered aloud to himself: “If only I could get out!”

The body of water that came so relatively close to the terrace was merely a dead arm of the lake,

not the lake proper. In his boyhood, however, his greatest delight had been to row out onto this lake.

"If there's a boat there, I'll do it." And he walked towards the row of reeds that wrapped around three sides of the deep-inset finger of the lake. There seemed to be no access anywhere. Finally, however, he found an overgrown path at the end of which stood the large summer boat his mother had used for many years when she went over to Karwe⁸⁹ to visit the Knesebecks. He also found rudder and poles. The flat floor of the boat was covered with dried rushes to keep one's feet from getting wet. Schach jumped in, loosened the line from the stake and pushed off. At first it was impossible for him to display any rowing skills because the area was so shallow and narrow that every stroke would have hit the reeds. But soon he was in a wider area and he could start using the oars. A profound quiet prevailed; day had not yet dawned and Schach heard nothing but a gentle billowing and rustling and the sound of water gurgling as it splashed against the reeds on the shoreline. At last he was out on the large lake through which the Rhin⁹⁰ flowed; the section where the current passed through could clearly be recognized by the rushing of the water, which otherwise was as flat and smooth as a mirror. He moved the boat into this current, turned it in the proper direction, lay down in the straw with the oars beside him and immediately felt the boat being pushed and gently rocked by the current.

The stars were becoming paler and paler and in the east the sky was turning red. Schach fell asleep.

When he awoke, the current had carried the boat far beyond the spot where the dead arm of the lake led to Wuthenow. So he took up the oars again and set to work at full strength to get out of the current and back to the place he had been. He enjoyed the exertion that it took to do this.

In the meanwhile, day had come. The sun hung over the ridge of the roof of the mansion in Wuthenow. On the other side of the lake the clouds glowed in the reflected light and the trees on the edge of the forest cast their shadow on the water. Out on the lake itself, however, life began to stir, and a peat boat taking advantage of the morning breeze glided past Schach in full sail. Suddenly he felt chilly, but he welcomed the chill for he felt clearly that it relieved the pressure weighing on him. "Wasn't he taking it too seriously? What did it amount to, after all? Spite and malice. And who can escape **that**? It comes and goes. One more week and the spite would die a natural death." But while he was thus comforting himself, other images came to his mind. He saw himself riding in a carriage past the Prince and his party to present Victoria von Carayon as his bride. And he heard clearly how old Princess Ferdinand would whisper to her daughter, the beautiful Radziwill: "*Est-elle riche?*" "*Sans doute.*" "*Ah, je comprends.*"⁹¹

Amidst such fleeting images and reflections he headed into the bay which had shortly before been so quiet. In the rushes near the shore colorful and mobile creatures had now come to life. The birds nesting in the reeds squawked or cooed, a couple of lapwings startled and flew away, and a wild duck that was looking curiously about dived beneath the water when the boat suddenly came in view. In another minute Schach reached the dock wound the line firmly around the stake, and climbed up the terrace without making any detour. On the uppermost level he met Krist's wife, old Mother Kreepsch, who was already up to take soilage to her goats.

"Good morning, Mother Kreepsch."

The old woman was startled to see the young man whom she had presumed to be in the garden salon and for whose sake she had not let the chickens out of their coop just so that their cackling would not disturb him. Now she saw him coming toward her from the front side of the manor.

"Good heavens, Master. Where are you coming from?"

89 A town in Brandenburg.

90 The Rhin is a 125 km long river in Brandenburg, Germany, right tributary to the river Havel. It flows through the city Neuruppin and several lakes.

91 "Is she rich?" "No question." "Ah, I understand."

"I couldn't sleep, Mother Kreepsch."

"And what was wrong? Were there ghosts again?"

"Almost. Mosquitoes and moths. I had left the light burning. And one of the windows was open."

"But why didn't you blow out the light then? Everybody knows where there's light, there's always goin' to be some moths and mosquitoes. I don't know. My old Kreepsch just gets dumber all the time. Well, well, and not a wink of sleep."

"But I did, Mother Kreepsch. I did sleep in the boat, and I slept well and soundly too. But now I'm cold. When you get the fire going, bring me something warm, won't you. Soup or coffee."

"Heavens, it's already going, sir. That's the first thing I do. Of course, of course, I understand. Somethin' warm is what you need and I'll bring it right away. Just let me take care of the old goat. She comes first. You wouldn't believe how tricky that old goat can be. She knows whether it's five or six just like she had a clock in her head. And if it's six, then she gets cantankerous. And if I come out and walk to milk her, what do you think she does then? She butts me. And always here, right near the hip. And why? Because she knows that that's where I have my troubles. But come on into our sitting room and sit down for a little while. My old man is out feedin' the horse right now. But it won't be fifteen minutes before you get your coffee, sir. And somethin' with it, too. The old woman from Herzberg who makes our breakfast rolls was just here."

As these words were spoken Schach entered the Kreepsch's sitting room. It was all neat and clean except for the air. There was an overpowering smell of the pepper and coriander mixture that the Kreepsches put in the corners of the sofa to keep the moths away. For this reason Schach opened the window and adjusted the hook; only then was he able to enjoy all the little things which decorated the "parlor." Over the sofa hung two small pictures from a calendar illustrating tales from the life of Frederick the Great: "Ah, you"⁹² beneath the one; "*Bon soir, Messieurs*"⁹³ beneath the other. These pictures, framed in braids, were surrounded by two thick wreaths of immortelles with black and white ribbons on them; on the little low stove there was a vase with quaking-grass. But the most important item of decoration was a small sentry box with a red roof, which in all probability had housed a baby squirrel that had pulled a little food box on wheels with a chain. Now it was empty and the food box rolled no more.

Schach had just finished his inspection when it was announced "we're got things set up over there."

And truly he was surprised when he entered the garden salon, which had so obstreperously refused to serve as night quarters, to see how much a sense of order and a few sympathetic hands had accomplished in the interim. The doors and windows were open, the morning sun filled the room with light, and all the dust had disappeared from the table and sofa. A moment later Krist's wife appeared too with coffee and rolls in a basket, and just as Schach was about to lift the lid of the small Meissen coffee pot he heard the bells of the village church.

"What's **that**?" Schach asked. "It can hardly be seven o'clock."

"It's exactly seven, master."

"But before they never rang until eleven. Then the sermon at noon...."

"Yes, that's how it used to be. But not any more. And every third Sunday is different. Two Sundays, when the reverend from Radensleben comes, then it's at twelve because he has to serve first in Radensleben. But on the third Sunday, when the old priest from Ruppin comes over, then it's at

92 Commemorates a supposed incident in the life of Frederick the Great in which the king is said to have admonished a Croatian soldier who had pointed a musket at him. Frederick raises his finger and say "Ah, you" (Du, du) and the Croat drops his musket and embraces the king's feet.

93 Probably a reproduction of Adolph von Menzel's portrait of Frederick the Great at the Battle of Leuthen (Lissa), 1757.

eight. And whenever old man Kriwitz looks out from a tower window and sees our parson setting out, then he rings the bells. And that's always around seven."

"What is the name of the man from Ruppin?"

"What do you mean? It's the same as it always was. Old Pastor Bienengräber is still there."

"He's the one who confirmed me. He was a very good man."

"Yes, that he is. But now all his teeth are gone, not even one left and he just mumbles and sputters all the time and not a soul can understand him."

"Oh well, that's not so bad, Mother Kreepsch. People always have something to complain about. And the farmers most of all. I think I'll go over and see what old Pastor Bienengräber has to say, to me and the others. Does he still have that horseshoe with the ten-pound weight on it in his living room? I always looked at that when I wasn't paying attention."

"Well, he probably does still have it, and the boys still don't pay attention as they should."

Then she left so as not to disturb her young master any longer and promised to bring him a hymnal.

Schach had a healthy appetite and found the rolls from Herzberg quite tasty, for he had not had anything to eat since leaving Berlin. But finally he stood up to go to the door leading to the garden. From there he looked out beyond the boxwoods and circular flower bed and far beyond the trees in the corner of the park, until his eyes finally rested on a pair of storks illuminated by the sun; they were walking around at the foot of the hill in a meadow dotted with red and yellow sorrel and buttercups.

A scene such as this made him ponder all sorts of things, but the bells were already ringing for the third time, so he went down into the village to sit in the manorial pew and find out "what old Paster Bienengräber had to say to him."

The Reverend Bienengräber spoke well enough, directly from the heart and from his own experiences, and when the last verse had been sung and the church was empty again, Schach sincerely wanted to go to the sacristy to thank the old man for many a good word in times past, and to accompany him back across the lake in his boat. On the way, though, he wanted to tell him the whole story and to ask for advice. He would certainly know what to do. Old people are always wise, if not because they know a lot, then just because they are old. "But," he interrupted himself in the middle of this plan, "what good will his answer do me after all? Don't I already know what he'll say? Don't I have the answer within me? Don't I know the Commandments? What I lack is just the desire to keep them."

And while he was thus talking to himself he scrapped the planned dialogue and climbed back up the hill to the manor.

He had not counted on a church service, and **still** it was only ten o'clock when he reached the top of the hill.

Back in the house he went through all the rooms, once, twice and looked at the pictures of all the Schach family members, which hung singly and in groups on the walls. All of them had had high positions in the army, all of them wore the Schwarzer Adler [Black Eagle] or the *Pour le Mérite*.⁹⁴ Here was a general who captured the big fortress at Malplaquet⁹⁵; there was a picture of his own grandfather, a colonel in the Itzenplitz Regiment, who with only four hundred men had held the church-yard at Hochkirch⁹⁶ for an hour. Finally he had fallen, hacked and shot to pieces as were all those with him. And between them were pictures of the women; a few were beautiful, but prettiest of all was his own mother.

94 Distinguished Prussian order established by Frederick the Great.

95 The Battle of Malplaquet, fought on 11 September 1709, was one of the main battles of the War of the Spanish Succession.

96 The Battle of Hochkirch was fought on October 14, 1758 during the Seven Years' War.

When he was back in the garden salon, the clock struck twelve. He lay down in the corner of the sofa, placed his hand over his eyes and forehead and counted the strokes. "Twelve. I've been here for twelve hours now and it seems like twelve years What would it be like to live here? Mr. and Mrs. Kreepsch on weekdays and on Sunday Bienengräber or the man from Radensleben, it didn't matter which, one as good as the other. They were good people, of course, all of them good And then I'd walk through the garden with Victoria and out of the park into the meadow, the same meadow which we see from the manor day in and day out, with its buttercups and sorrel. And sometimes the storks would be out walking too. Or we'd be alone, or perhaps there'd also be a three-year-old boy running along beside us singing over and over: "Adebar, good mister, bring me a sweet sister."⁹⁷ And the lady of the house, my house would blush and wish for the same thing. And when eleven slow years have passed, we'd have reached the "first stage," which is called the "straw anniversary." A strange word. And then it would be about time to have one's portrait done, to have it for the gallery. After all, we can't be missing from the family line. And I would take my place among the generals as a captain; Victoria would go among the beautiful women. But ahead of time I'd have a little conference with the painter and tell him "I'm counting on you to capture her *expression*. It's her spirit that makes her like the other women." Or maybe I'd come right out and say "Don't be too hard on her." No, no!

XV.

The Schachs and the Carayons

And once again, things happened as they always do: the Carayons heard nothing about what half the town already knew. Tuesday Aunt Marguerite appeared as usual, she found Victoria's chin a bit peakish, and exclaimed in the middle of dinner, "You do know, my dears, they say someone has published some caricatures?"

But it went no further than that because Aunt Marguerite numbered among those old society dames who have always just "heard" about everything, and when Victoria asked, "Well, what **are** they, Auntie?" she only repeated, "Caricatures, my child. Of that I'm quite sure." And with that the topic was dropped.

It was certainly a blessing for both mother and daughter that they learned nothing about the mocking caricatures of which they were the subjects. But for the **third** party, for Schach, it was just as certainly a misfortune and a source of new strife. If Frau von Carayon, whose finest quality was a heartfelt sense of compassion, had had even the slightest notion of all the trouble that had been cast upon her friend for all this time, she would not have changed her demands, but would at least have offered a postponement, comfort and sympathy. But having no knowledge of what had happened in the meantime, she turned against Schach more and more, and from the moment she heard about his return to Wuthenow she indulged in the strongest and most unflattering complaints that he had broken his word and his promise, as she saw it.

She soon heard of his retreat. On the same evening that Schach had gone on leave, Alvensleben had come calling on the Carayons. Victoria, who found any company painful, withdrew to her room, but Frau von Carayon invited him and received him with special cordiality.

"I wish I could tell you what a pleasure it is to see you again after so many weeks, dear Alvensleben. So many things have happened since then. And how fortunate that you stood firm when

97 In German folklore storks are referred to with the name Adebar, sometimes Meister Adebar. Adebar is implored to bring a sibling to Schach's son.

they tried to force you to play the role of Luther. That would have ruined my image of you forever.”

“And yet I did waver a moment before declining, my dear lady.”

“And why did you do that?”

“Because our mutual friend had declined just **before** me. I find it especially annoying to follow in his footsteps all the time. There are certainly already enough people who label me as a poor copy of him, Zieten more than anyone. Recently he shouted at me, ‘Just watch out, Alvensleben, that you aren’t listed as Schach the Second in the officers’ promotion and housing lists.’”

“That’s something you don’t have to worry about. You’re quite different.”

“But not better.”

“Who knows.”

“Coming from the lips of our Frau von Carayon, this expression of doubt surprises me somewhat and would ruin our friend’s stay in Wuthenow perhaps if he were to hear about it.”

“His stay in Wuthenow?”

“Yes. He’s on indefinite leave. Hadn’t you heard about it? Surely he didn’t return to the old castle on the lake—Nostitz told me recently that it’s half worm-eaten and half Romantic—without saying goodbye to you!”

“Yes, that’s how it happened. He’s moody, as you well know.” She wanted to say more but she succeeded in controlling herself and in continuing the conversation on various topics of current interest. During this conversation Alvensleben perceived, to his relief, that she knew absolutely nothing about the chief item of current interest, namely the appearance of the caricatures. And truly it did not occur to Frau von Carayon in the few days since Auntie’s visit to want to hear anything more about that which Auntie had intimated.

Finally Alvensleben took his leave, and Frau von Carayon, freed now of all constraints, rushed into Victoria’s room with tears streaming from her eyes to inform her of Schach’s flight. For flight it was indeed.

Victoria listened attentively to every word. But whether she was hopeful and confident, or conversely, resigned, she remained calm.

“Please don’t rush to judgment. We’ll get a letter from him that will explain everything. Let’s just wait a while; you’ll see that you are more ill-humored and suspicious than you ought to be.”

But Frau von Carayon was not about to change her mind.

“I knew him when you were still a child. Only too well. He’s vain and haughty, and dealing with royalty at court has heightened his expectations. He’s becoming more and more ridiculous. Believe me, he wants to be a man of influence, and secretly he’s nourishing his ambition to become some kind of politician or even a statesman. What bothers me most is that he has suddenly become aware of his Obotritian nobility,⁹⁸ and has started to imagine that just being a Schach gives him a place in world history.”

“And so he’s no worse than anyone else. They **all** do it And the Schachs really **are** an old family.”

“Well, he ought to think of that and spread his peacock’s tail when he struts around the chicken-yard at Wuthenow. And there are chicken-yards like that all around. But what good is that to **us**? Or better, what is it to **you**? He could prance right past me; he could turn his back on a farmer-general’s daughter, a little plebeian. But you, Victoria, you aren’t just my daughter, you are your father’s daughter as well, you are a **Carayon**.”

Victoria looked at Mama with a hint of roguish amazement.

“Yes, child, go ahead and laugh. I won’t take it amiss. You’ve seen me laugh about this sort of

98 The Obodrites were a confederation of medieval West Slavic tribes within the territory of modern Mecklenburg and Holstein in northern Germany. For decades they were allies of Charlemagne in his wars against the Germanic Saxons.

thing often enough. But, my sweet Victoria, the times are different, and today I apologize to your father and thank him from the bottom of my heart for giving me, in his pride in his nobility, an excellent weapon against this unbearable arrogance, even though he drove me to distraction with it and bored me so much that it drove me away from him. Schach, schmach! Who are the Schachs? I don't know their history and don't **want** to know it, but I'll bet my brooch here against a hatpin that if you threw the whole lot of them on the threshing-floor where the wind blows strongest, nothing would remain but a few colonels and captains, all of whom died most humbly and all of them with their French red-wine noses. Can you tell me anything at all about **those** people?"

"But Mama . . ."

"And now for the Carayons! It's true, their cradles never stood on the Havel or even on the Spree, and bells never rang in either the Brandenburg or the Havelburg cathedrals when one of them came or went. Oh, *ces pauvres gens, ces malheureux Carayons!*⁹⁹ They had their castles, **real** castles, by the way, but, poor wretches! They lived in the Gironde, they were mere Girondists.¹⁰⁰ And your father's cousins were victims of the guillotine because they were independent and loyal at the same time, and spoke up for their king's life unintimidated by the cries of the masses."

Victoria listened with ever greater amazement.

"But," Frau von Carayon continued, "let me not speak of current events, not speak of **today**. For well I know that being too recent is always a crime in the eyes of those who have been around for a little longer—no matter **how** they got where they are. No. I'll speak of the old days, of the time when the first Schach came to the country and to Lake Ruppín, threw up a wall, dug a trench, and heard a Latin mass without understanding a word of it. That was just about the time that Carayons, *ces pauvres et malheureux Carayons*, marched in company to Jerusalem, conquered and freed it. And when they came home, singers came to their court, and they sang themselves. And when Victoria de Carayon (yes, her name was Victoria, too) married the great Count of Lusignan, whose honorable brother was the Grand Marshall of the Knights Hospitaller and finally became King of Cypress, we were then related to a royal house and related by marriage to the Lusignans, out of whose house came the beautiful nymph Melusine of unfortunate, but—thank God—at least not prosaic memory. And this Schach thinks he can reject and arrogantly retreat from us Carayons, who have seen and done so many marvelous things? He's ashamed of **us**? He, Schach? Is he doing it as a Schach or as the manorial lord of Wuthenow? Bah! There's nothing to either one of them. A Schach is blue coat with a red collar and Wuthenow is a mud hut."

"Mama, believe me, you're being unfair to him. I see him from different side and I **find** things there, too."

Frau von Carayon bent down and kissed Victoria with much emotion. "Oh, how good you are, much, much better than your mama. The **only** thing good about her is that she loves you. But he ought to love you **too**! If only because of your humility."

Victoria smiled.

"No, don't smile. The belief that you are impecunious and rejected rules you with the force of an *idée fixe* [strongly held opinion]. You're **not** so impoverished. He, too . . ."

She hesitated.

"You see, you were a beautiful child, and Alvensleben told me how enthusiastically the Prince just recently spoke again of your beauty at the Massow's ball. All that is not gone, and anyone with enough understanding and heart to examine our qualities lovingly will find it. And if anyone is duty-bound to do so, it's **him**! But he resists because he's as conventional as he is proud. He's always so afraid he's going to do something society won't approve of. He listens too much to what people say;

99 French. Oh those poor people, those unhappy Carayons!

100 A political party of moderate republicans whose leaders were deputies from the department of Gironde.

we, as women, have to do that, but when a man does it, I call that cowardice and *lâcheté* [slackness]. But he's going to have to answer to me. I've prepared a plan to humiliate him, just as certainly as he wanted to humiliate us.”^f

After this conversation Frau von Carayon returned to the corner room, sat down at Victoria's small writing desk and wrote:

“Herr von Schach, today, Saturday evening, I learned from Herr von Alvensleben that you have left Berlin and have decided to sojourn in the country in Wuthenow. I have no cause to begrudge you your stay in the country nor to contest your right to it; but I must place my daughter's rights over against yours. Please allow me to remind you, then, that we agreed to publish the engagement announcement tomorrow, Sunday. And I still insist on its publication. If it has not appeared by Wednesday morning, then I will have to undertake measures that one would expect in such a case. As much as this goes against my grain (not to speak of Victoria, who knows nothing of what I am writing to you and would only try to stop me if she knew), nevertheless, the circumstances which you know only too well (to say the least) leave me no choice. Until Wednesday, then!

Josephine von Carayon”

She sealed the letter and handed it personally to a messenger with the instruction to set out for Wuthenow at daybreak.

She specifically forbade the messenger to wait for a reply.

XVI.

Frau von Carayon and Old Herr von Köckritz¹⁰¹

Wednesday came and went with no letter from Schach or even the requested engagement announcement. Frau von Carayon had not expected otherwise and had made her plans accordingly.

Early on Thursday morning a carriage stopped in front of the house to take her to Potsdam, where the King had been staying for a few weeks. She planned to prostrate herself at his feet, to present Schach's repulsive behavior to his view, and to appeal for his aid. She never doubted for a moment that it would be within the King's power to give his support and to call for a settlement. She had also pondered the ways and means of approaching His Majesty, and with some success. She knew Adjutant General von Köckritz, who as a young lieutenant or staff-captain thirty years or more ago, had frequented her parents' house and had brought “little Josephine,” everyone's favorite child, many a box of candy. He was now a favorite of the King, the most influential person in his closest circle, and it was through **him** (for she had maintained at least a superficial contact through the years) that she felt assured of gaining an audience with the King.

She was in Potsdam by noon and got out at the Hotel Einsiedler,¹⁰² spent some time at her *toilette* [getting dressed up] and went straightway to the castle, only to learn from the chamberlain, whom she happened to meet coming down the outside staircase, that His Majesty had already left

¹⁰¹ Köckritz is a German noble family. The figure here is possibly Karl Leopold von Köckritz (1744-1821).

¹⁰² The Hotel Zum Einsiedler was located at Schlossstrasse 8, in downtown Potsdam. Built in 1744, it survived until the night of 14 April 1945 when it was destroyed.

Potsdam and gone to Paretz.¹⁰³ There he would greet Her Majesty the Queen, who intended to return from Bad Pyrmont the next day and together they proposed to spend a week together in happy retreat from the pressures of the court.

That was indeed bad news. For someone who is taking his distressing case to the capitol (and even if a capital offense were at stake) and is waiting for the terrible end, there is nothing more difficult than delay. Hurry, hurry! One can carry on for a short time, but then one loses one's nerve.

With heavy heart and plagued by the thought that this particular failure might mean a failure of the whole venture, Frau von Carayon returned to the hotel. There could be no thought of traveling to Paretz today, especially since one could not possibly request an audience so late in the afternoon. She had to wait until tomorrow! She ate a small dinner, at least she sat down at the table; and she seemed resolved to spend the long, long hours in the solitude of her room. But the thoughts and images which came to her, and especially the solemn forms of address which she repeated to herself for the hundredth time—repeated them so many times that she felt that when the great moment finally came she would not be able to utter a single word—all of this forced her to resolve to tear herself away from her brooding and to take a ride through the streets and surrounding area of the city. Surely enough, a hired servant appeared and offered his services. And at six o'clock a moderately elegant rented coach stopped in front of the hotel since the equipage that had brought her from Berlin was thoroughly in need of rest after its half-day exertion in the summer sand.

“And where would my lady like to go this evening?”

“I'll leave it to you. Just no castles, or at least as few as possible; but parks and gardens, water and meadows will be fine.”

“*Ah, je comprends* [I understand],” replied the servant in his best French, for he was used to thinking of his best customers as half French; or perhaps he thought he ought to take Frau von Carayon's French name into consideration. *Je comprends.*” And he instructed the driver, who sat on the coach-box in his old galloon hat, to drive first to the “New Garden.”

It was quiet as death in the “New Garden” and the dark, melancholy boulevard lined with cypress trees seemed endless. Finally they turned right onto a lane that ran beside a lake; the extended and low-hanging branches of a single row of planted trees touched the surface of the water. The sinking sun gleamed and glistened in the filigree of the leaves. Beauty such as this made Frau von Carayon forget all her sorrows and she did not feel free from its spell again until the coach turned off the shore road to go back through the main part of the park. Soon afterward they paused in front of a house made of bricks but decorated richly with gold and marble.

“Who owns this house?”

“It's the King's.”

“And what's it called?”

“The Marble Palace.”

“Ah, the Marble Palace. Isn't that the palace where . . .”

“If it please you, my lady, that's the palace where His Majesty the late King Frederick Wilhelm the Second succumbed finally to a long and painful bout with dropsy. And everything is still the way it was. I know the room very well in which the kind and gracious old man always took oxygen, his 'life gas,' which Privy Counsellor Hufeland ordered brought to him in a small balloon or perhaps merely in a calf's bladder. Would the lady care to see the room? It is a little late, but I know the groom there and he would do it on my recommendation, of course. And in the same small room you'll find a statue of Frau Rietz, or some people says it's Mamsell Encken, or Countess Lichtenau¹⁰⁴; I mean it's only a small

103 Paretz is a village in the German state of Brandenburg in the district of Havelland, west of Berlin.

104 These are all names for the same person, Wilhelmine, Countess of Lichtenau, born as Wilhelmine Enke, also spelled Encke. She was the official mistress of King Frederick Wilhelm the Second from 1769 until 1797, and was elevated by

statue, it just shows down to the hips or less.”

Frau von Carayon thanked him, but in view of the ordeal that awaited her tomorrow, she was not in a mood to want to see **any** part of Mrs. Rietz, not even her portrait bust. Thus she expressed the wish to drive further and further into the park and did not have to turn around until the sun had gone down and cooler air announced the arrival of evening. And truly it was nine o'clock when they passed by the Garrison Church on the way back, and before the carillon had ended its chorale, the coach stopped in front of the Hotel Einsiedler.

The trip had strengthened her and given her back her courage. It had also resulted in a beneficent fatigue and she slept better than she had for some time. Even the content of her dreams was bright and light.

The next morning her carriage from Berlin, having had time to rest, appeared in front of the hotel as had been agreed. However, since she had every reason to distrust the knowledge and experience of her own coachman, she again engaged (under the pretext of needing an extra “hand”) the same hired servant who yesterday had so excellently taken care of her—despite the peculiarities of his class. And he was able to repeat yesterday's success. He could comment on every village and country mansion they passed by, and especially about Marquardt, in whose park that summer cottage could be seen which was of at least passing interest to Frau von Carayon. There the “fat king” (as her cicerone, growing more and more confidential, called him without hesitation) had, with the assistance and under the direction of General von Bischofswerder, seen spirits.

A quarter of a mile past Marquardt they had to pass through the Wublitz, an inlet of the Havel covered with lilies; next came fields and meadows with their rich growth of grass and flowers, and before mid-day they had reached a bridge and then an open iron gate, which formed the entrance to Paretz Park.

Frau von Carayon, who saw herself now in the role of suppliant, with her refined sense of what was appropriate, had the carriage stop at this place and got out to walk the rest of the way. There remained only a short, sun-lit stretch, but the sunlight itself was uncomfortable for her and she kept to the side under the trees so as not to be seen prematurely.

Finally she reached the sandstone steps of the castle and bravely climbed up the steps. The proximity of danger had restored a part of her natural resolve.

“I should like to speak with General von Köckritz,” she said to one of the footmen in the vestibule, who had stood up as soon as the charming lady had entered.

“And who may I say is calling?”

“Frau von Carayon.”

The footman bowed and came back with the answer that the general invited her to step into the ante-chamber.

Frau von Carayon did not have long to wait. General von Köckritz, of whom it was said that except for his passionate devotion to his king, he knew no greater love than a pipeful of tobacco and rubber at whist, came out to meet her from his study, immediately remembered the days now gone by, and bade her sit down with a most engaging motion of his hand. His whole being so much expressed benevolence and awakened confidence that the question of his cleverness hardly mattered. Especially for those who, as Frau von Carayon, came on some private concern. And that is why most people come to court. He thoroughly confirmed the doctrine that an atmosphere of princely **benevolence** is far preferable to sparkling intellectuality. Certainly, however, these personal servants of the sovereign should not also be servants of the state, nor should they have a voice in governance.

General von Köckritz had placed himself so that Frau von Carayon had a view of his profile.

him to the nobility. She is regarded as politically active and influential on the policy of Prussia during his reign.

His head was stuck deep in a very high and stiff military collar, from which a lace frilling gushed out in front; and in the back there hung a small and neatly maintained pigtail. The latter seemed to lead a life of its own and moved back and forth easily and with a certain coquetry, even when the man himself did not seem to make the slightest motion.

Without forgetting the seriousness of her situation, Frau von Carayon cheered up visibly because of this peculiarly teasing game, and having once reached a happier state, the thing that she needed to do seemed easier and more manageable, and she was able to speak freely about anything and everything, even about **that** which could best be described as the “delicate point” in her (or her daughter's) matter.

The general had listened not only attentively, but sympathetically as well, and said, when Frau von Carayon had finished, “Yes, my lady, those are very unfortunate matters, things His Majesty doesn't like to hear about, for which reason I usually maintain my silence, you understand, as long as there's no remedy and nothing at all that can be done to improve the situation. But in this case something **can** be done, and I would be negligent in my duty and would do His Majesty a disservice if I were to withhold from him a case such as yours, or, since you have come in person, if I were to hinder your presentation of your case by inventing excuses. For all difficulties are always imaginary in a country such as ours, where princes and kings have for centuries championed the peoples' rights and have not been of a mind to avoid protecting those rights by comfortably stepping aside. Least of all my most gracious Lord and King, who has a very strong sense of the proportionality of the law, and therefore, has a great disdain and hearty dislike for all **such** people, who, like so many of the officers (and especially the otherwise so well-behaved and brave officers of the said Regiment Gensdarmes) out of arrogance and conceit are inclined to permit themselves all sorts of foolishness, and think it proper and laudable or at least not inadmissible to sacrifice the happiness and reputation of other people to their own high spirits and poor *moralité*.

Frau von Carayon's eyes filled with tears. “*Que vous êtes bon, mon cher Général.*”¹⁰⁵

“Not I, my dear lady, but my most gracious Lord and King, **he** is good. And I think that you shall soon have in hand the proof of his goodness, despite the fact that we have a bad, or shall I say, a difficult day ahead. For, as you may know already, the King is expecting the Queen to return within a few hours, and in order to be undisturbed in the joy of their reunion, for **that** reason he's staying here, that's **why** he has come to Paretz. And now, even in this idyllic spot, he's pursued by a legal issue and a controversy. And a controversy of so delicate a nature. Yes, whimsical Dame Fortune is giving him quite a slap in the face. Just when he is looking forward to the joys of love with the Queen (and you know how much he loves her), practically at that very moment when they were to be reunited, he hears a story of unhappy love. That will put him in a bad mood. But he's simply too gracious not to overcome this little upset, and if we do our task only tolerably well, we'll be able to profit from this meeting. For you see, the joy that he expects soon to have will make him all the more ready to restore the beclouded happiness of others. I know very well his sense of justice and the goodness of his heart. And so I shall go now and inform him that you, my dear lady, are here and request a hearing.”

But suddenly he stopped as if remembering something and turned around again, adding, “But if I am not mistaken, he has just gone out to the park. I know his favorite spot. Just let me have a look. In a few minutes I'll have an answer for you as to whether he'll hear you or not. So once again, be of good cheer! You have nothing to fear.”

And with that he took his hat and cane and stepped out directly into the park through a small side door.

In the reception room where Frau von Carayon had stayed behind there were all sorts of colored

105 French. “You are so kind, my dear General.”

prints such as were then fashionable in England: angels' heads by Joshua Reynolds, landscapes by Gainsborough, and a couple of copies of Italian masterpieces, among them a penitent Mary Magdalene. Was it the one by Correggio? The marvelous deep blue cloth that half concealed the penitent woman captured Frau von Carayon's attention and she stepped closer to ascertain who the painter was. But before she could decipher the signature, the old general returned and bade his protégée follow him.

And thus they walked into the park where a profound tranquillity prevailed. The path twisted around birch trees and silver firs and led them to an artificial rock cliff overgrown with ivy in front of which (old Köckritz had now remained behind) the King sat on a stone bench.

He stood up when he saw the lovely lady approaching and stepped forward to greet her in a serious and friendly manner. Frau von Carayon was about to make a full curtsy, but the King would not allow it and raised her instead with his hand, saying "Frau von Carayon? I remember you well . . . There was a children's ball . . . a beautiful daughter . . . back then."

He was silent for a moment, either from embarrassment at the last words he had let slip, or perhaps out of sympathy for the deep emotion of the unhappy mother, who stood almost trembling before him, and then he continued, "Köckritz gave me some idea . . . **Most** unfortunate . . . But please . . ., sit down, my lady . . . Courage. Now tell me about it."

XVII.

Schach in Charlottenburg

A week later the King and Queen left Paretz, and the very next day Captain Schach rode out to Charlottenburg, where the court had now moved, in response to a confidential communication delivered to him in Wuthenow. His path led through the Brandenburg Gate and the wide Tiergartenallee, behind him to his left an orderly officer named Baarsch,¹⁰⁶ a red-head with freckles that looked like a dish of lentils and an even redder beard, which jutted out slightly. About this beard Zieten used to say that "this perch too may be recognized by its fins." A native of Wuthenow and a childhood playmate of his lord and captain Schach, he was, understandably enough, unconditionally devoted to Schach and to anything that bore that name.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon and there was not much activity on the streets, although the sun was shining and there was a refreshing breeze. They encountered only a few men on horseback, among them a couple of officers from Schach's regiment. Schach returned their salute, passed the Landwehrgraben [defense trench], then turned soon afterward onto the wide main street of Charlottenburg with its summer homes and front gardens.

His horse started to turn in at the Turkish Tent,¹⁰⁷ which was normally his goal, but Schach forced him on and did not stop until the Café Morell, which was better located for the day's course of action. He swung out of the saddle, gave his reins to the orderly and headed towards the castle without hesitation. Only after he had gone by a bleak quadrangle of grass burnt up by the July sun did he reach a wide staircase and then a narrow corridor on the walls of which portraits of Frederick William the First's goggle-eyed, blue-uniformed giants¹⁰⁸ paraded seemingly larger than life. At the end of this passageway, however, he met a chamberlain who led him, after a preliminary announcement, to the

106 German *Barsch* is "perch," enabling Zieten's pun in the next lines.

107 The oldest of the taverns in the suburb of Charlottenburg.

108 Soldiers selected by the king for their physical stature.

King's office.

The King stood at a desk with maps spread out in front of him—a few diagrams of the Battle of Austerlitz.¹⁰⁹ He turned away immediately, approached Schach and said: “Sent for you, dear Schach . . . the Carayon girl, an unfortunate business. Don't like the role of moralist and hair-splitter. Hate it. Made mistakes, too. But don't get caught up in mistakes. Make reparations. Don't quite understand, anyway. Beautiful woman, the mother, **really** liked her, smart woman.”

Schach bowed.

“And the daughter! I know, I know, poor child . . . But *en fin* [after all] you must have found her *charmant*. And what once was *charmant* to you can be so again if you only want it to be. But that's **your** business, not my concern. What does concern me is *honnêteté* [uprightness]. **That** I demand, and for the sake of this *honnêteté* I demand that you marry this Fräulein von Carayon. Otherwise you'd have to resign your commission and quit the service.”

Schach said nothing but his bearing and countenance betrayed that **that** would be the most painful thing in the world for him.

“So, you'll stay then. Handsome man. I like that. But redress must be made, and soon, and directly. By the way, an old family, the Carayons, and that name won't spoil your daughters' entitlements to (*pardon*, dear Schach) Marienfluss or the Heiligengrabe home for unmarried women. So, it's agreed then. I'm counting on it, and I demand it. And you'll report back to me.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“And one more thing. Spoke to the Queen about this. Wants to see you. Women's whim. You'll find her over there in the orange garden . . . Thank you.”

Schach was dismissed graciously. He bowed and went down the corridor to the opposite wing of the castle to the large glass greenhouse of which the King had spoken.

But the Queen was not yet there. Perhaps she was still in the park. So he went out into the park and walked up and down on a tiled path among a crowd of Roman emperors that had been set up there; a few of them seemed to watch him with satyric grins. Finally, he saw the Queen coming towards him from the bridge; a lady of the court was with her, evidently the younger Fräulein von Viereck. He walked toward the two and at a calculated distance stepped aside to do his military honors. The lady in waiting remained several steps behind.

“I'm happy to see you, Herr von Schach. You've just come from the King?”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“It was somewhat daring of me to have you come to see me,” the Queen continued. “But the King, who opposed it at first and made fun of me for it, finally permitted it. I am just a woman, and it would be difficult if I had to renounce my female nature just because I am a **queen**. As a woman I am interested in everything that concerns our sex, and what could be of greater concern to us than such a *question d'amour*?”

“Your Majesty is too kind.”

“But it is not about you, dear Schach. It's for the sake of the young lady . . . The King told me everything and Köckritz added what he knew. It happened the same day that I arrived at Paretz from Pymont, and I can hardly tell you how much I sympathized with the young lady. And now you, **you** of all people, think you can deny this dear child your sympathy and her rights at the same time. That is impossible. I have known you for so long and I always thought of you as a cavalier and a man of honor. And I think we ought to leave it at that. I heard about the caricatures that were published, and so I assume that they confused you and prevented you from using your better judgment. I understand it, I know from personal experience just how much the poisoned arrow hurts and that it doesn't merely

¹⁰⁹ The Battle of Austerlitz (then part of Austria), December 2, 1805, was one of Napoleon's greatest achievements and considered a tactical masterpiece. The King is looking for a similar victory here.

wound our spirits but actually changes us, and **not** for the better. However that may be, you ought to have thought about your own best interest and, in that connection, remembered what duty and honor **demand**.”

Schach said nothing.

“And you **will** do it,” the Queen continued, becoming more agitated, “we will see you penitent and contrite. It won't be too difficult for you, for the King assures me that even in the complaint against you there was always a tone of affection. Try to be mindful of that if you should ever hesitate again—but I don't expect that you will. I can think of nothing I'd rather see right now than the resolution of the conflict and the union of two hearts, which seem to me to be made for each other. Especially if it were brought about by genuine love. For I certainly hope you won't deny that it was some mysterious characteristic of hers that drew you to that once so beautiful child. I would hate to think the opposite. So hurry back home now, create your happiness and be happy! My best wishes go with you, **both** of you. You will live in seclusion as long as circumstances necessitate, but in any case I expect you to report to me on the events in your family and to enter the name of your queen as first godmother in the church register in Wuthenow. And now, God be with you.”

A friendly wave of goodbye accompanied these words. When Schach had almost reached the entrance of the garden, he looked around again and saw the two ladies turn off onto a side path that led to a shadier part of the park closer to the Spree.

Within a quarter of an hour Schach himself was back in the saddle. Orderly Officer Baarsch followed.

The gracious words of both royal majesties did not lack for effect. Schach, however, was only touched; his mind had not been changed in the slightest. He knew what he owed the King: **obedience**! But his heart rebelled, so the only course for him was to find something that united obedience and disobedience, something that simultaneously satisfied the King's order and the demands of his own inner being. And there was only **one** thing that did that. An idea which he had had earlier at Wuthenow returned to him now and quickly matured into a decision, and the more firmly this decision took root, the more quickly did Schach regain his former good disposition and inner peace. “Life,” he said to himself, “What is living? Only a question of minutes, it hardly matters whether it's today or tomorrow.” And for the first time after days of heavy pressure he felt unburdened and free again.

But as he rode home and reached the place in the road where an old chestnut-lined boulevard branched off towards the Kurfürstendamm,¹¹⁰ he turned onto the boulevard, motioned to Baarsch to come alongside as he dropped the reins and positioned his left hand on the croup of his horse: “Tell me, Baarsch, what do you think of getting married?”

“Lord, Captain, what do I know about it? My late father always used to say, 'getting married is good, but still better is not getting married.'”

“Yes, I'm sure he said something like that. But what about **my** getting married, Baarsch?”

“Aw, you wouldn't do that, Captain!”

“Well, who knows . . . Is it such a terrible thing, after all?”

“Lord, Captain, it ain't for **you**, but it is for me . . . “

“How so?”

“Cause I made a bet with Corporal Czepanski that nothing would come of it at all. And the one who loses has to pay the bill for all the junior officers.”

“But how did you know about it?”

“Good Lord, there've been rumors going 'round for a long time. Then when those pictures came out last week”

110 A major boulevard in Berlin.

"I see . . . Well, tell me, Baarsch, what kind of a bet is it? Are the stakes high?"

"Oh well, it's not too bad, Captain. A Cottbusser sausage and a kümmel.¹¹¹ But for every single one of 'em."

"Well, Baarsch, I don't want you to take a loss. I'll pay the stake."

After after that he fell silent, but muttered to himself "*et payer les pots cassés*."¹¹²

XVIII.

Fata Morgana¹¹³

Schach was back home by a reasonable hour and that same evening wrote a letter to Frau von Carayon begging pardon for his behavior in a tone quite sincere, to all appearances at least. He wrote that a confidential communication he had received the day before yesterday in Wuthenow had made it necessary to ride to Charlottenburg that afternoon and that there the King and Queen had reminded him of what his duty was. He regretted that he had needed such a reminder, found the steps that Frau von Carayon had taken to be justified, and requested permission to appear before the two ladies the next morning to repeat to them personally his sorrow for these recent transgressions. In a postscript, which was longer than the letter itself, he added "that he had been through a crisis, but that was all behind him now, and he thought that they would **never** again have cause to doubt him or his sense of justice. The only thing that mattered to him now was to make up lawfully for all that had happened. What the further course of things would be was best left undiscussed for the present."

This letter, transmitted by the little groom, was answered immediately by Frau von Carayon in spite of the late hour. She said she was happy to have encountered so conciliatory a tone in his letter. Yes, it would be best to be silent about all that which, according to his letter, now lay in the past. She, too, felt that **she** should have acted more calmly and carefully, that she allowed herself to get carried away. And the **only** thing that might perhaps serve as her excuse was that only two days before had she found out about those malicious attacks in words and pictures that seemed to have affected his behavior during the course of the last week. Had she been aware of this earlier, she would have judged many things more gently, in any case she would have adopted a patient attitude towards him and his silence. She hoped that everything would fall into place now. Victoria's great love for him (perhaps too great) and his own inclinations (which, she was convinced, could waver but never be permanently shaken) were her best guarantees for a peaceful and, if her prayers were heard, also for a happy future.

The next morning Schach was announced to Frau von Carayon. She went to meet him, and the conversation that developed immediately betrayed less embarrassment on both sides than might have been expected after all that had happened. And yet there was an explanation for that too. Everything that had happened, as painfully as it had been felt in Berlin and in Wuthenow, was finally understood by each of the two parties, and where there is understanding, there is also forgiveness, or at least the possibility of it. Everything had developed as a natural consequence of the circumstances, and neither

111 Kümmel is a caraway-flavored liqueur thought to aid in digestion.

112 French. "And I'll have to pay the consequences." But, taken literally, it is a word play on the French expression and could also be taken to mean that Schach will pay for any tankards, jug, or pots broken by the enlisted men while drinking.

113 An illusion or mirage.

Schach's French leave nor the complaint that Frau von Carayon had taken to the highest level of power, had been meant to express ill-will or spitefulness.

When the conversation began momentarily to falter, Victoria appeared. She looked very good, not languished, but rather more pert than ever. He went towards her, not coldly and ceremoniously, but warmly; and the expression of an inward and genuine sympathy in the way that he looked at her and offered her his hand sealed the peace. There could be no doubt: he was moved; and while Victoria beamed with happiness, tears filled her mother's eyes.

Frau von Carayon realized that should strike while the iron was hot. So she asked Schach, who had already gotten up, if he would be so kind as to stay for a while so that together they could make the most pressing decisions. What she had to say, she continued, could be said in very few words. One thing was certain, that time had been lost, and it was most recommendable that this delay be made up as soon as possible. Her long years of friendship with Consistory Councilman Bocquet, a high-ranking official in the Church who had officiated at her own marriage and had confirmed Victoria, offered the best possibility. It would be easy to have the banns published only once instead of the usual three times. That should certainly take place next Sunday, and on Friday of the following week—for she had learned from personal experience that, contrary to popular opinion, Fridays were auspicious and **not** unlucky days—the wedding would take place. And why not right here in their apartment, because she heartily detested weddings in restaurants or hotels. The young couple could decide for themselves what would happen after that, but she was curious as to whether the route would take them to Venice via Wuthenow or to Wuthenow via Venice. Both of them had lagoons and gondolas, and she only asked for one thing: that the narrow little bridge near the reeds on the lake in Wuthenow, where the boat was tied, would never be called the “Bridge of Sighs.”¹¹⁴

Of such was their conversation, and thus the visit ran its course.

On Sunday the banns were published, as had been agreed, and Friday, the day of the wedding, was fast approaching. The whole Carayon household was in a state of excitement, most of all Aunt Marguerite, who now appeared every day; her naive felicity now made up for all the unpleasantness otherwise inseparably bound up with her visits.

Schach came in the evenings. He was in a better mood and less critical than usual, and very noticeably (although fortunately no one **did** notice it) he avoided speaking of the wedding or the preparations for it. Asked whether he would like something done this way or that, he replied with a kind of eagerness, “do it exactly as you think best. I know what a fine sense of tact and what good taste you ladies have and know that the decisions will be best made without my advice and interference. And even though a lot of this seems mysterious and incomprehensible to me, this is actually an advantage, because from my youth up I have always preferred to be surprised.”

And it was with such excuses that he extracted himself from any conversation that had the “special day” *en vue* (as Aunt Marguerite put it); but he was all the more talkative when the conversation came around to the honeymoon **after** the wedding. Despite all of Frau von Carayon's mild objections, they had chosen to go to Venice rather than Wuthenow first. And whenever the conversation took that turn, Schach pursued every imaginable plan and idea for the trip with a fantasy usually wholly alien to him. He wanted to cross over to Sicily and sail past the Isle of the Sirens “whether bound to the mast or loose, that he would leave to Victoria and her trust in him.” Then they wanted to go to Malta. But certainly not just to see Malta—no, no—but because on the way to Malta they would pass by the place where the mysterious dark continent would speak for the very first time in mirages and reflections to the Hyperboreans,¹¹⁵ born in mist and snow. **That** was the place where this

114 The Bridge of Sighs (Italian: Ponte dei Sospiri) is a bridge in Venice, northern Italy. Because of associations with the bridge, Frau von Carayon's statement could be interpreted as a wish for the couple's happiness.

115 Northerners, northern Europeans.

fairy so rich in images dwelled, the **silent** siren, whose magical colors were almost more seductive than song. The scenes and figures of her *laterna magica*¹¹⁶ were constantly changing. There would be a tired procession moving across the yellow sand, then suddenly there would be green meadows, and under the shading palms men would be sitting in a group with heads bowed and pipes lit; then black and brown girls, their hair let down and dressed for the dance, would take up cymbals and strike the tambourine. And in the midst of all this, you'd think you were hearing laughter. Then it would grow silent and disappear. And this mirage, mysterious and remote, **that** was their goal!

And Victoria was jubilant, swept along by the vivacity of his description.

But in the same instant a feeling of nervousness and gloom seized her, and a voice within her soul called out: *fata morgana*, this is an illusion.

XIX.

The Wedding

The marriage ceremony had taken place, and at four o'clock the wedding guests gathered in the large dining hall at the rear of the house. Normally this room was thought to be merely an uncomfortable appendage to the Carayons' apartment and was today being used for the first time in a number of years. This seemed advisable even though not a great many guests had been invited. The Reverend Bocquet had allowed himself to be prevailed upon to attend the dinner, and sat opposite the newlyweds and next to Frau von Carayon. Other guests in attendance were Nostitz, Alvensleben, Sander, and, of course, Auntie and a few friends from the time when Herr von Carayon had supervised land holdings. Schach had emphatically insisted on inviting Sander, despite his indifference to the rest of the guest list, because he had learned in the meantime of Sander's scrupulous behavior in response to the offer to publish the three caricatures, a reaction which touched Schach all the more because he had not expected it from **those** quarters. Bülow, Schach's old opponent, was no longer in Berlin, and probably would not have come even if he had still been there.

The mood at the table continued in traditional solemnity until the first toast. Then old Bocquet spoke and made a three-part toast full of "historical retrospective": he first mentioned the grandfather's high office, then he referred to Frau von Carayon's own wedding, and finally remembered Victoria's confirmation (and even repeated the Bible verse given her then to accompany her through life). Finally, he closed with a half-serious, half-joking allusion to the "miraculous Egyptian bird"¹¹⁷ with which they would hopefully enjoy associating," and that was the sign for a change of mood. Everyone succumbed to unconstrained merriment, even Victoria, and the more so when dear Auntie, who in honor of the day had appeared in a grass-green silk dress and tortoise-shell ornamental comb, finally stood up to offer the couple a **second** toast. Although she had tapped bashfully on the water pitcher with her dessert knife for a while, she had gone unnoticed until Frau von Carayon declared that Aunt Marguerite had something to say.

Aunt Marguerite then bowed to acknowledge that that was her intention and began her speech with much more self-confidence than might have been expected after her shyness at the beginning. "Pastor Bocquet spoke so long and beautifully, and I'm only like the woman Ruth who went through the fields gathering corn, which was the text for the sermon last Sunday at the little Melonen Choich,"¹¹⁸ which was almost empty again, not more than twelve or thioiteen were there. But as aunt of our dear

116 A device for projecting pictures.

117 A very oblique reference to "the stork."

118 French-Protestant chapel on the Kommandantenstrasse.

bride—and in this connection I'm so itainly the oldest one here—I raise my glass to drink to the health of the young couple once again.”

And after that she sat down again to receive the approbation of everyone at the party. Schach attempted to kiss the old lady's hand, but she refused, accepting Victoria's embrace instead, with all sorts of little caresses while assuring them that she knew it all along, from that afternoon when they took the trip to Tempelhof and walked out to the church. For it had not escaped her notice that while Mama had gotten the big bouquet of violets, Victoria held another too, and that she had wanted to present it to her bridegroom at the door of the church. But when he got there, she had thrown the small bouquet away and it fell right next to the door on a child's grave, and that **always** means something, and it did **this** time too. And although she was not a superstitious person, she did believe in natural affinities, only when the moon was waning, of course. That whole afternoon was still as clear in her mind as if it had been yesterday, and even if some people had pretended not to know anything, she still had two good eyes, and knew well enough where the best cherries grew. She continued in this vein for a while without making her meaning any clearer.

After Aunt Marguerite's toast everyone began to move away from his assigned partners at table. The guests exchanged their seats to pop up first in one group, then in another. After the large “fortune candies” from Josty's¹¹⁹ had been passed around and all the proverbs—such as “Love, love, thou silly sprite, e'en thy arrows put none to flight”—had been deciphered and read aloud (despite the small and illegible script), they got up from the table. Alvensleben led Frau von Carayon; Sander escorted Aunt Marguerite and seized the occasion to make some witty remarks about the story of Ruth, which pleased Aunt Marguerite so much that she whispered to Victoria as the coffee was being served, “Charming man. So gallant, and he says such clever things.”

Schach talked a lot with Sander, inquired about Bülow, “whom he never especially liked, but despite all his quirks was always a subject of interest,” and asked Sander to express as much to Bülow when the opportunity presented itself. In everything he said there was a tone of friendliness and an inclination to reconciliation.

Nor was he alone in the inclination to reconciliation, for Frau von Carayon exhibited the same tendency. When she personally served him a second cup of coffee, she said, as he was taking sugar from the bowl, “Could I have a word with you in private, my dear Schach?”

And she preceded him into the adjacent room.

“Schach, my dear,” she began, taking a seat on the floral settee so that both of them had a view of the corner room thanks to the open French doors, “these are our last few minutes together, and I'd like to unburden my heart of a few things before we say goodbye to one another. At my age I'm not going to be coquettish, but a year is a long time, and who knows if we'll ever see each other again. I won't say a word about Victoria. You won't have a bit of trouble with her: she wouldn't and couldn't create any difficulties because she loves you too much. And you, dear Schach, will show yourself worthy of this love. I'm sure you won't hurt a sweet creature who is all humility and devotion. It would be impossible. So I won't ask you to make any promises. I know that I can trust you.”

Schach did not meet her eyes as she said this, but let the coffee trickle from the decorative little spoon into the cup, which he held in his left hand.

“Since our reconciliation,” she continued, “I have regained my old confidence. But this confidence, as I said in my letter, slipped away from me more than I would have thought possible, in the days now fortunately behind us; during that time I used some harsh words against you when I spoke with Victoria and even harsher when I was alone with myself. I called you petty and arrogant, vain and predictable, and what's worse, I accused you of ingratitude and *lâcheté*. Now I'm sorry for it and

119 Josty's was a famous café in Berlin.

ashamed of a passing mood that allowed me to forget our past.”

She stopped for a moment, but just as Schach was about to reply, she refused to let him and said, “Just one more thing. Everything I said and thought in those days weighted on my conscience and necessitated this confession. But now everything is out in the open between us, and I can look you in the eye again. But enough of that. Come on, I'm sure someone has already missed us.”

And she took him arm and said jokingly, “It's true, isn't it? *On revient toujours à ses premiers amours*.¹²⁰ And how glad I am that I can say that with a laugh and in a moment of complete and perfect happiness.”

From the corner room Victoria approached Schach and her mother as they came back and said, “Well, what's all this about?”

“A declaration of love.”

“I thought so. Isn't it lucky we're going away tomorrow, Schach? There's nothing I'd less rather do than play the role of a jealous daughter.”

And mother and daughter took a seat on the sofa where Alvensleben and Nostitz joined them.

Just at that moment Schach was informed that the carriage was ready and he seemed to turn pale at the announcement. Frau von Carayon noticed it too. But he collected himself quickly, said his goodbyes, and walked out to the corridor, where his little groom was waiting with his hat and coat. Victoria followed him out as far as the steps, where the daylight dimly shone through from the courtyard.

“Until tomorrow, then,” said Schach, and quickly turned and walked away.

But Victoria bent over the railing and repeated softly, “Until tomorrow. Did you hear me? . . . Where will we be tomorrow?”

And behold, the sweet sound of her voice did not lack for effect, not even on **this** occasion. He bounded up the steps, embraced her as if he were taking leave for ever, and kissed her.

“Goodbye, Mirabelle.”

And she followed the sound of his steps in the hall. Then the front door clicked shut and the carriage rolled down the street.

Officer Baarsch sat on the coach-box with the groom; the former had requested that he be allowed to drive his captain and lord on this his day of honor. Permission had been immediately granted. As the coach turned off of Behrenstrasse onto Wilhelmstrasse there was a jolt or kick, but there was nothing on the road to have caused it.

“**Damn**,” said the groom. “**What's that?**”¹²¹

“What is it? What could it be, boy? It's a stone or a dead sergeant.”

“**Oh, no**, Baarsch. Not **stone**. **'t was something**. . . dear me . . . like shooting.”

Baarsch questioned the word shooting. “Well, I guess it could be.”

“**Yes, pistol-shooting** . . .”

But the sentence was never finished for the coach stopped in front of Schach's apartment and the groom jumped down from the coach-box hurriedly and with trepidation to be of help to the master in getting out. As he opened the coach-door, a thick cloud of smoke rushed out at him. He saw Schach sitting upright in the corner, leaning back only slightly. On the carpet beneath his feet lay the pistol. Terrified, the boy slammed the door shut again and exclaimed, “**Heavens, he is dead.**”

Baarsch cursed and cried and blamed everything on “humanity” because he didn't have the courage to blame it on marriage. For his was a diplomatic nature, like all peasants'.

120 French. One always returns to one's first loves or inclinations. Possibly a quote from “*Joconde, ou les Coureurs d'aventures*” by Niccolo Isouard (1775 -1818), text by Charles Guillaume. May also be just a proverb.

121 The groom's words are in English in the original.

XX.

Bülow to Sander

“Königsberg,¹²² September 14, 1806.

. . . And you also wrote me about Schach, dear Sander. I was aware of the bare facts; the Königsberg newspaper mentioned the matter briefly, but I had no explanation until I received your letter—in so far as there **can** be any explanation for it. You know my tendency (which I am following today too) to deduce general principles from particulars; but, to be sure, I often do it the other way around and go from generalities to the particular. It may be a questionable practice and take me too far afield on occasion. But anyway, if ever there were a justification for such a habit, then this incident fills the bill. And I'm sure that **you** especially will understand quite well why the case of Schach, which is only a symptom, is so terribly interesting to me precisely because of its symptomatic meaning. It says something about our times, but, of course, its meaning is restricted to one geographic area. What caused it makes it a most unusual case, one which could only happen the way it did in the capital and residential city of His Majesty the King of Prussia, or if anywhere else, at least not outside the ranks of our latter-day Frederician army. For that army has only arrogance instead of honor, and clock-work for a soul, a mechanism which will very soon have run down. The great king laid the foundation for this awful state of affairs, but his great eyes (and it is well known that people were more terrified of his gaze than of battle or death) were to close forever before it could get as bad as it has.

I have observed this army long enough to know that every third word it utters is “honor”: a dancer is *charmant* 'upon my honor'; a white stallion is *magnifique* 'upon my honor'; indeed, I've met and had loan sharks recommended to me who were *superb* 'upon my honor'. And this constant speaking of honor, of a false honor, has blurred the concept and been the death of honor.

All of that is reflected in the case of Schach, in Schach himself, who, despite all his faults, was nevertheless one of the best of the lot.

How does the story go? An officer associates with a noble family. He likes the mother, and one fine day in May he likes the daughter too, perhaps, or let's say, most probably because a few days earlier Prince Louis had lectured him about '*beauté du diable*.' But, no matter, he likes her, and nature takes its course. Under these circumstances, what would be more natural and simpler than settlement by a promise of marriage, by an alliance which would not have conflicted with material advantage or any kind of prejudice? But what happens? He flees to Wuthenow simply because the precious creature in question has a few more dimples in her cheek than is fashionable or traditional, and because these 'few dimples too many' allowed his enemies to turn our smooth and horsetail-polished Schach into a laughing stock for a month. So he flees, I say, forgetting word and duty, like a common coward. And when his 'most gracious lord and king' (to use his own words) finally reminds him of his duty and his word and demands strict obedience, then he obeys, but only by being most defiantly disobedient in the very act of obeying. He can't even tolerate Zieten's mocking glance, much less a new glance of caricatures, and terrified by a shadow, by a soap bubble, he resorts to the standard expedient of the despondent: *un peu de poudre* [a bit of gun powder].

And there you have the essence of false honor. It makes us dependent on the most transitory and capricious things in the world, makes us dependent on the opinion of the world, which is built on shifting sand, and causes us to sacrifice the most sacred commandments and the most beautiful and

¹²² Königsberg, former capital of Prussia, now Kaliningrad.

natural human emotions to the idols of society. And Schach succumbed to this cult of false honor, which is really nothing but vanity and wrongheadedness. But mark my words, greater ones than he will follow. Like ostriches we have our heads buried in the sand so as not to see or hear anything. But that kind of bird-brained precaution never saved anyone. When the Ming dynasty was about to crumble and the victorious Manchurian hordes had already forced their way into the palace gardens of Peking, messengers and ambassadors were still appearing before the emperor to announce victory after victory, because it was an offense against *bon ton* [sophisticated manners] in polite society and at the court to speak of defeats. Oh, this *bon ton*! One hour later an empire lay in ruins and a throne had been toppled. And for what reason? Because pretense leads to lying and lying leads to death.

Do you remember that evening at Frau von Carayon's when I said something similar on the theme of '*Hannibal ante portas*'¹²³? At that time Schach accused me of being unpatriotic. Unpatriotic! Prophets are always called that. And now you see! What I envisioned then as a mere probability has now become **fact**. We are now in a state of war. And I know in my heart of hearts just what that means. This world of proper façades will be our undoing, just as it was Schach's.

Yours, **Bülöw**

Postscript. Dohna (who was with the Garde du Corps), with whom I just spoke concerning the Schach affair, has an interpretation which reminded me of something Nostitz said earlier. He thought that Schach loved the mother, so if he married the daughter, he would have suffered from a peculiarly stressing romantic conflict. Do write me about it. Personally I find it intriguing, but unlikely. Schach's vanity insured his complete coldness of heart all his life, and his ideas about honor (here he was right for a change) would have kept him from making a single *faux pas* [false step] if he had really made a marriage with the daughter.”

XXI.

Victoria von Schach to Lisette von Perbandt

“Rome, August, 18th, 1807.

Ma chère Lisette,

I wish I could tell you how moved I was by your kind letter. Even in the midst of the misery of war, its losses and injuries, you have overwhelmed me with proofs of an old, unchanging friendship, and you have not held my sins of omission against me.

Mama wanted to write several times, but I myself asked her to wait.

Oh, my dear Lisette, you've shown interest in my fortunes and I think the time has come for me to tell you everything. And you're right. I'll do it as well as I can.

'What's behind all this?' you ask and then add that you were confronted by a riddle you couldn't solve. My dear Lisette, how does one solve such puzzles? Never. Certain things remain inexplicable and mysterious. And we are not allowed to see into the ultimate and most secret motives of other peoples' behavior or even of our own. People tell me that it was Schach the Handsome and, to put it mildly, Victoria the Unhandsome that encouraged all the mockery, and he didn't have the strength to stand up to it. And so, because he feared life, he chose death.

That's what people say, and they're probably right about a lot of it. He did write me something

123 Latin. Hannibal is at the gates, the enemy is already here.

like that and complained about it. But the world was stricter than was necessary, and he too perhaps. I see it in a different light. He knew very well that sooner or later all the joking would grow stale and disappear, and he was certainly man enough to stand up to the mockery if it **didn't** wither and die. No, he wasn't afraid of this battle, or at least not in the way people think. But a wise voice, the voice of his own inner self, told him that it was **useless** to fight; and that even if he did win this fight with the world, he **wouldn't** win against himself. **That's** what it was. He, more than anyone I've known, is one of those men who are not made for marriage. On an earlier occasion I told you about an excursion to Tempelhof, which was a turning point for us in more ways than one. Returning from the church we talked about knights in orders and their rules, and the tone of genuine seriousness with which he touched upon the subject, despite all my teasing, made it clear to me just what his ideals were. And **none** of these ideals—despite all his affairs, or perhaps because of them—included marriage. I can still assure you, and the desires of my heart can't dispute that insight, that I could hardly imagine him *au sein de sa famille*.¹²⁴ Who can imagine a cardinal (I see them here everyday) as a husband? And that's the way it was with Schach.

Well, there you have my confession and his thoughts and impressions must have been similar, even though he said nothing about it in his letter of farewell. His whole personality was more oriented towards keeping up his image and asserting a certain *grandezza* [exaggerated dignity], more towards **externals**. From this you can see that I'm not overestimating him. Really, when I saw Bülow get the best of him time and time again in their arguments, I knew only too well that he was a man of neither outstanding intellectual abilities nor of superior character. All that I freely admit, but on the other hand he was completely capable of being brilliant and masterful within certain narrow circles. It was as if he had been born to be the demigod of some princely court and would have fulfilled this destiny—please don't laugh at this—to create his own happiness, but also for the welfare and benefit of others, indeed, many others. For he was a good man, and also wise enough to have the best intentions always. In his career as the favorite of a prince and a man of power and influence, I would have been a hindrance. I, with my ordinary habits, would have torn him away from any kind of career and forced him back to Wuthenow to help me plant asparagus or to take baby chicks away from their mother. He was terrified of that. He saw a petty and limited life ahead of him; he thought he was made for—I don't want to say **better** things—but at least for something that seemed better to **him**.

He would have gotten over my lack of beauty. I wasn't actually displeasing to him (I almost hesitate to write this down), and perhaps he really did love me. To judge by his last lines addressed to me, that was the case. But I don't quite believe his sweet words. But he was gentle and sympathetic, and he wanted to make up for all the pain he caused me by his life and death, insofar as that was possible.

All the pain! How strange and hard this word looks on the page! No, my dear Lisette, I'll say nothing about all the pain. I had resigned myself to my fate early on and thought that I had no right to the best that life has to offer. But now I've experienced it. Love. And how it ennobles me and fills me with trembling and changes all pain to pleasure. My child is lying here and has just opened its eyes.¹²⁵ **His** eyes. No, Lisette, a lot of trouble has come my way, but it is nothing compared with my happiness.

The child, your god-child, was so sick that it almost died and was saved only by a miracle.

And I'll have to tell you about that, too.

When the doctor could do nothing more, I went with our landlady (who is a genuine old Roman, full of pride and magnanimity) up to the Araceli Church, an old Romanesque church next to the Capitol. There they keep on display a wooden doll, the "Bambino," the Christ Child, with large glass eyes and a whole diadem of rings given Him by countless mothers in thanks for His help. I took a ring

¹²⁴ French. As a family man, in the bosom of his family.

¹²⁵ Fontane never reveals whether the child is a boy or girl, concealing it under the neutral form of *das Kind*.

to Him even before I was sure of His assistance, and my faith must have touched the Bambino. For you see, He did help. The crisis came immediately and the *dottore* [doctor] pronounced his '*va bene*' [it's OK]. The landlady just smiled as if she had performed the miracle herself.

And I wonder what Aunt Marguerite would say about all this 'superstition' if she heard about it? She would warn me about the 'old choich' and with more justification than she could imagine.

Because Araceli is not only **old**, it's also comforting and refreshing, cool and beautiful.

The nicest thing about it, though, is its name, which means 'the altar of heaven.' And daily I give thanks before this altar.”